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Metaphors of Religion

A Conceptual Framework

Metaphor Papers 1

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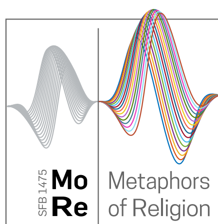

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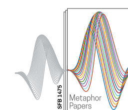

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Metaphors of Religion

A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT The following is a marginally edited version of the conceptual considerations presented in the proposal for the establishment of Collaborative Research Center (CRC) "Metaphors of Religion: Religious Meaning-Making in Language Use." It was written by the authors in cooperation with the CRC-team. The CRC has been established by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 2022 at Ruhr University Bochum (RUB) and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). To start our working paper series *Metaphor Papers*, we wish to present the CRC's conceptual framework to a broader scholarly community. Our CRC starts from the assumption that religious meaning-making occurs in and through metaphors. In metaphors, meaning is transferred from one semantic domain to another. Religion, which can never put its ultimate subject (the transcendent) directly into words, is especially dependent on this procedure. Religious meaning-making thus occurs as religion draws from its semantic environment and transfers meaning to its own domain. The CRC seeks to more thoroughly understand this process theoretically and grasp it methodologically to be able to research its semantic forms empirically and comparatively. In this way, the shapes religion takes as a socio-cultural phenomenon can be better understood and central developments within specific religious traditions become much more tangible. The CRC thus contributes to the historiography of religions, on the one hand, and to answering systematic questions in the comparative study of religions, on the other. While extensive research on metaphors in religious texts exists, the CRC's novel approach lies in its systematic focus on metaphoricity as the central principle of religious meaning-making. This is based on a shared understanding of religion as communication and metaphor as a fundamental principle of language. We understand religion to be the form of communication that has the function of coping with ultimate contingency by means of the transcendence/immanence-distinction. In this paradoxical process, the metaphor with its simultaneousness of 'is like' and 'is not' is used to infer the unknown (target domain) from known means (source domain) and in this way creates religious meaning.

KEYWORDS metaphor, religion, communication, conceptual metaphor, deliberate metaphor, allegory

Research Question and Initial Thesis

[1] The history of religions is full of metaphors. Deities are variously described as stellar objects, animals, or indeed human beings. Believers are presented as a flock, a ship's crew, or children. Their religious lives are presented as a journey, an apprenticeship, a struggle, a path. Not only are metaphors ubiquitous in religious texts, but they are also reconfigured continuously and reinterpreted in commentary literature and doctrinal reflection. Scholars of religion, in turn, have, for a long time, analyzed religious metaphors and demonstrated their centrality for the development of religious thought in a given tradition.

[2] However, while the number of studies devoted to specific metaphors within a particular text or textual tradition is considerable (see chapter *State of the Art*), very few scholars have stopped to ask *why* metaphors are so pervasive in religious texts. In other words, what is lacking is a systematic understanding of the function of metaphors in religious language. To reveal the central research question of our Collaborative Research Center (CRC) "Metaphors of Religion": *How do metaphors work in religious language?* According to our thesis, the metaphorical is not optional, not a decorative accessory in religious language. Rather, metaphors are the building blocks of religious language par excellence. They do not embellish religious language but constitute it, and, as a result, play a central part in the emergence and development of religion itself. Put differently, through metaphors, religion 'draws semantic energy' from other societal spheres and transforms it into specific religious meaning. Religious language is hence characterized by a process in which semantic contents are being transferred from non-religious areas—*domains* in linguistics—into a religious context and thus constituted as religious entities. In our view, this is a unique feature of religion in comparison with other societal spheres since religion cannot literally describe its central point of reference—the transcendent—and must therefore transfer meaning from other areas to generate religious meaning.

[3] Our thesis is grounded in multiple conceptual ideas mostly originating from the scholarly fields of the study of religion, on the one hand, as well as linguistics, philologies, and area studies, on the other. The thesis implies specific understandings of several meta-linguistic terms such as communication, religion, domain, sense, metaphor, and transcendence. Some of these terms are themselves metaphorical in character—including religion itself (cf. Tweed 2005), as well as metaphor as transmission (μεταφέρω). All terms that are central to the CRC will be explained in the following. Most notably, in order to go beyond specific religious semantics formed in metaphors—the *what*—and to address the inner workings of metaphoric language—the *how*—we will need a formalized understanding of religious meaning and transcendence, allowing us to compare concrete semantics and identify different kinds of semantics with which formal transcendence is 'filled' (see chapter *Conceptual Considerations I: Understanding Religion*).

[4] The interaction of two semantic domains is called mapping or blending in linguistics; we will briefly discuss the differences between the two approaches and the possibilities of their combination below (see chapter *Mapping and Blending*). Mapping or blending

can take place in language in different ways (Fauconnier 1997), but it is especially condensed in the form of a metaphor. The process of mapping or blending through metaphors is thus at the heart of the CRC's work.

Although the study of metaphor is an ongoing challenge for linguistics and, by extension, for this CRC, we can build upon significant methodological advances from the linguistic field and find metaphor analysis to be manageable in a collaborative project, in turn facilitating integral collaboration in the CRC. While the linguistic metaphor forms the common starting point of all CRC subprojects, our work will also consider structurally similar forms of mapping or blending, which may contribute to the formation of religious meaning in a similar way. For example, a parable or a similar narrative form can be based upon the transfer of semantic potential from a non-religious area into the religious realm in much the same way that a linguistic metaphor is (see, e.g., Scheuer 2016). So, while metaphors are perhaps the most common and distinctive form the process of mapping or blending can result in, we are also equipped to deal with less straightforward and possibly more ambiguous variants (see chapter *Extended Metaphor and Allegory*).[1] [5]

In line with this open approach, the CRC uses linguistic methods of metaphor identification and analysis (especially annotation) as well as other methods. These range from classical hermeneutic methods (such as close reading) to instruments of qualitative social research and computational analysis. However, these methods are not unconnected but related to one another in the sense of a mixed-methods approach (see chapter *Collaboration Based on a Mixed-Methods Approach*). One of the CRC's methodological goals is to integrate the different approaches gradually. In the CRC, thus, moving towards the achievement of our research goals will go hand-in-hand with an ever-improving and constantly integrating methodological approach. [6]

As mentioned above, research has long been intensively concerned with individual religious metaphors[2] or fields of metaphors identified in religious texts, demonstrating that metaphors shape religious doctrines, cosmologies, experiences, rituals, and ethics. In our perspective, however, research on metaphors in religious use needs to be expanded in three respects: [7]

1. **Comparative studies:** It is striking that there is hardly any comparative research on metaphors used in religious language. Admittedly, several studies shed light on the use of a particular metaphor in different religious traditions El-Sharif (2011). [8]

1 This is in line with metaphor analysis approaches from the social sciences (see, e.g., Schmitt 2017) that tend to emphasize the similarities between 'metaphor' and other concepts, such as 'patterns of interpretation' (Germ. 'Deutungsmuster'), 'frames', etc. For various social science methods of metaphor research, see Junge (2014) and, with their own approach, Kruse, Biesel, and Schmieder (2011).

2 The term 'religious metaphor' could be understood in two ways: It could refer to metaphors in which religion is either the target domain or the source domain. In the latter case, a religious reference is used to talk about something or someone else. For example: "This politician can walk on water." In the former case, a reference from another societal field is used to talk about (or indeed constitute) religion. For example: "The Lord is my shepherd." In the planned CRC, we will focus on religion as a target domain and will use the terms 'religious metaphor' and 'metaphors of religion' interchangeably in that sense.

But a broader, collaborative research project that takes a look at metaphor genesis and metaphor use both diachronically and in a cross-cultural perspective has not been undertaken (although such a project has been demanded time and again in the literature; see, for instance, Campany 2003, 290; Hock 2010). Which metaphors are produced and used in certain religious traditions, and when and how this happens in one tradition but not in another is therefore severely under-researched.

2. **Theory formation:** As will be explained in more detail below, our thesis is connected to a theoretical debate in the study of religion, which, in simplified terms, revolves around the question of whether religion is best described as a distinct (although not separated) socio-cultural domain and societal function that we can reasonably assume to find, in one form or another, across cultures, or whether the term religion is so profoundly entangled with the particularities of Europe, the West, and Christendom that it is best abandoned and regarded as a mere invention within the modern European intellectual history (see chapter *Conceptual Considerations I: Understanding Religion*). If, as our thesis maintains, it can be demonstrated that religious meaning emerges via metaphors, then this would befit a notion suggested in sociological differentiation theory, namely that religion as a societal system differentiates itself from general socio-cultural processes (without, however, becoming anything other than, with Durkheim's term, a *fait social*). In such a view, religion is neither a scholarly invention nor is it, as again others seem to suggest, a metaphysical fact or an a priori of human consciousness (e.g., James [1902] 2002; Otto [1917] 1923; Troeltsch 1913). In the perspective of the CRC, metaphors presuppose the existence of different domains, and these, in turn, are the semantic correlate of socio-structural differentiation processes. In this regard, religion, as it makes use of metaphors, must be an area that is socially differentiated to some extent at least. In our view, this fundamental significance of metaphors for the understanding of religion has so far been disregarded in research, beyond a few scattered hints. The CRC is thus entering uncharted research territory at this point. [9]

3. **Methodological innovation:** We are convinced that, historically and systematically, comparative research within the framework of empirically-based theory formation can benefit considerably from using computer-based analytical methods and from developing such methods further for our purposes. This further development of suitable methods for analyzing metaphors in historical texts (especially in various languages) is a research lacuna in its own right. For this reason, colleagues from computational linguistics and digital humanities are centrally involved in the CRC. From a methodological point of view, the planned CRC aims to supplement the philological-hermeneutic and qualitative-social scientific work in the subprojects with corpus-based analyses and thus to increase the comparability of the results from the subprojects. A 'Thesaurus of Religious Metaphors' (TRM) created in this way will be one of the central results of the collaborative work. [10]

To facilitate the operationalization of our main questions, the following sub-questions are considered—partly in the entire CRC, partly in individual projects, working groups, and workshops: [11]

- What are the semantic areas that feed religious meaning-making? Which natural, mental, and social phenomena (including their subdomains) are used as source domains for the generation of religious metaphors in the respective research material? [12]

- What influence do certain fields of metaphor have on the formation and further development of a particular religious tradition—for example, spatio-temporal fields such as those of traveling, or metaphors taken from politics, law, or economics, as well as anthropomorphic metaphors?

- Which metaphors constitute religious thinking as it relates to cosmogony, cosmology, concepts of sacrifice, revelation, anthropology, concepts of God (anthropomorphism, theriomorphism, phytomorphism, etc.), religious self, 'salvation paths' ("*Erlösungswege*"; Weber [1922] 1980, 321), and apocalypticism/eschatology?

- Can dominant metaphors be identified in specific religions at specific times as well as across religions? And if so, which ones?

- How are metaphors transformed, limited, accepted, and, in some cases, constituted in situations of interreligious contact?

- What is the historical and intertextual development of individual metaphors?

- Which metaphors are used in religious self-description (e.g., Islam as bowing, Dao as way)?

These and similar questions cannot, of course, be answered exhaustively within the planned CRC (and especially concerning the entire history of religion). But they are suitable for guiding the subprojects—with different emphasis—and our collaborative work. [13]

The topic of the proposed CRC by no means requires a focus on written, verbal language, but, for pragmatic reasons, we have decided to limit the scope of our research to textual sources for the first phase. While we maintain that "conceptual metaphor is not limited to language, although language can be used to demonstrate how it works" (Knowles and Moon 2006, 35), we have to concede that the analysis of metaphors in visual sources and material artifacts is methodologically still underdeveloped (cf. Schmitt 2017, 467) and would thus place a significant burden on the project, particularly concerning its comparative intentions. Therefore, texts from various genres, such as influential, possibly canonical, texts, as well as commentaries and exegetical texts will be used as [14]

sources. However, a special CRC working group, which has already been formed and will continue work in the first CRC phase, will discuss the possibilities for the analysis of non-textual sources and develop related methodological suggestions. We expect to be able to include non-textual sources in a later CRC phase on the basis of these types of input (cf. Radermacher (2023)).

State of the Art

Besides research on metaphors and metaphor theories in general,[3] studies on the use of metaphors in specific religious traditions, time periods, and geographic regions exist in large number—for example, concerning the Ancient Orient (Pallavidini and Portuese 2020; Lam 2019; Westh 2011; Wasserman 2003; Black 1998; Streck 1999), Greek Antiquity (Zanker 2019), the Hebrew Bible (Verde and Labahn 2020; Gault 2019; Hecke 2005; Bergmann 2008; Häusl 2003), the New Testament and early Christianity (Breytenbach 2016; Gomola 2018), Vedic religion and Hinduism (Myers 1995; Pandharipande 1987; Patton 2004, 2008; Piatigorsky and Zilberman 1976; Potter 1988), Buddhism (Tzohar 2018), the Qur'an (Abdulmoneim 2006), and even with regard to contemporary online discussions and social media (Myrendal 2015; Pihlaja 2017). Some studies take an overarching perspective on certain fields of metaphors, such as metaphors of light (Kapstein 2004), metaphors of space (Knott 2006; Chun 2002; Horn and Breytenbach 2016), and anthropomorphisms (Johnson 1987; Guthrie 1993; Douglas [1966] 1991; Smith 2016; Wagner 2014). However, as mentioned above, the number of studies devoted to the diachronic and synchronic comparative analysis of metaphors remains limited and must be advanced (Chun 2002, 152). For example, the vertical-spatial differentiation UP/DOWN, which is at the core of several metaphors and essential in many religious traditions, is a cross-cultural conceptual metaphor. Still, its semantic composition varies culturally—and sometimes considerably so. In English, for example, the future is often attributed in ascending order and the past in descending order, whereas the reverse is true in Chinese (Chun 2002). In diachronic and synchronic comparative perspectives, similarities and differences in the use of metaphors in different religions, and thus in long-term historical developments, can be identified (for more information on how we plan to work in collaboration to make such comparisons possible. [15]

Moreover, despite the large number of empirical studies devoted to metaphors in the religious context, the fundamental relationship between metaphor and religion has only been explored rudimentarily: "Modern metaphor analysis has barely scratched the surface of this domain [i.e., religion], but much more work can be hoped for in the future" (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, 211). Most of the existing studies which touch on such theoretical questions come from the theologies, the philosophy of language, linguistics, individual philologies, and literary studies (for examples, see Noppen 1988; Boeve and Feyaerts 1999; Biebuyck, Dirven, and Ries 1998; Botbol-Baum [1996] 2007). In [16]

3 See, for example, based on Blumenberg ([1960] 2010): Haverkamp (2007); with regard to a systematization of the history of metaphor theories, see Goldmann (2018).

the theologies—not so much in their historical but in their systematic subdisciplines—the study of the characteristics of religious metaphors is of particular importance because, among other things, religious truth questions are discussed on this basis Bernhardt and Link-Wieczorek (1999). From the perspective of the study of religion, however, questions of religious truth are irrelevant. Instead, the discipline, and our project in particular, wishes to examine how socio-cultural evidence for religious truth claims is produced and which role metaphors play in this context. So far, this has been a desideratum of research on religion. Klaus Hock, who wrote an instrumental overview article on the topic of 'Metaphor in the Perspective of Religious Studies,' summarizes the state of research as follows: "There is no independent discourse on the topic of 'metaphor' in the study of religions" (Hock 2010, 71). This has not changed significantly to date.

Among the few studies that systematically deal with the religious use of metaphors, the book by Soskice (1985) and the essay by MacCormac (1983) deserve special mention. Both emphasize the importance of metaphor in reference to religious transcendence. It is along these lines of theoretical thinking that this CRC aims to advance our systematic understanding of religion and metaphor. As discussed below, going into such a direction will require bringing into conversation, on the one hand, theoretical thinking from the field of the study of religion (especially as it relates to language, communication, and the transcendence/immanence-distinction), and, on the other hand, a nuanced understanding of 'metaphor' as put forward in linguistics. [17]

In the CRC, advancing our theoretical understanding of religion and metaphor will go hand in hand with the development and constant refinement of our methodological thinking and tools. This seems particularly important because the reference to linguistic and cognitive science metaphor research in the research field is currently very uneven. For example, the work of Olaf Jäkel (2002) and Edward Slingerland (2011) in the context of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) explicitly fits into the approach of cognitive-linguistic investigation of metaphors; others, however, do not refer to linguistic and psychological metaphor research (such as, e.g., Petrovic and Petrovic 2016). Some studies work with a mixture of approaches from modern metaphor research and concepts taken directly from the source material (for more or less explicit metaphor theories, see, e.g., Covill 2009; Tzohar 2018; Ebeling and Cunningham 2007). While most studies identify and interpret metaphors in a hermeneutic-philological way, one of the exceptions is the work of Camilla Di Biase-Dyson (2017a, 2017b, 2016a, 2016b), who takes a corpus-linguistic approach and applies the 'Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam' (MIPVU) (Steen, Dorst, et al. 2010) (on the role of this procedure in our CRC, see forthcoming Metaphor Paper by Dipper and Elwert). [18]

This mixed picture is often inspiring, but it does make the comparative studies we are striving for in the CRC more difficult—not only in terms of the discrepancies in terminology. We are convinced that object-language differences in the understanding of metaphor and cultural differences in the semantics of metaphors can only be worked out if a formal, consistent methodological approach is applied to the heterogeneous material in order to enable comparisons. This pertains also to our working definition derived [19]

from the current state of research (see chapter *Our Working Definition of Religion*). At the same time, merely adopting existing approaches from linguistic metaphor analysis for the CRC would run the risk of missing crucial particularities and special requirements of research on religion. We will thus need to adjust the existing methodological tools in accordance with our research question and, in this way, contribute to the further development of such tools beyond the CRC—especially with regards to their application in a multi-language context.

Conceptual Considerations I: Understanding Religion

As discussed in more detail below, the approach providing the basic theoretical and methodological assumptions for this project is firmly grounded in sociological assumptions adopted from systems theory. This approach, of course, finds itself amidst a diversity of other approaches and discourses in the vital and heterogeneous field of the study of religion. All of these perspectives contribute in one way or the other to our endeavor—be it as an impulse to be adopted in our project or as something we find important to challenge. During the research, we will also deal with the criticism of our approach—for example through external perspectives of visiting scholars and Mercator fellows—and, if necessary, draw conceptual and methodological conclusions. In the following, we briefly summarize a few of these perspectives in no particular order to make transparent why we have chosen a systems theoretical framework for this project. [20]

Disciplinary history often recounts that a milestone was reached in the 1960s when Clifford Geertz offered a middle ground between phenomenological and functional approaches (Geertz [1966] 1973). He and others popularized what is now called the *cultural turn* in the humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences. The cultural turn further developed linguistic and structural work done in the first half of the twentieth century. The decades since the 1970s saw an emergence of further 'turns' or perspectives on religion, which sought to either overcome perceived weaknesses in other approaches or open new paths of thinking about and studying cultures, societies, and religions. [21]

One of these new paths of thinking, often called *postcolonial approaches*, originated in literature studies and drew attention to the fact that all scientific work was and is entangled with political and economic power relations (as an overview see Young 2003). This resulted in a heightened awareness of asymmetrical relations between researchers and their research 'objects' (the 'writing culture debate') and encouraged scholars to scrutinize their approaches, methods, and results in light of these considerations. Following a somewhat different path, the *cognitive science of religion* takes up advances in neuroscience (see, e.g., Martin 2017). Scholars in this field seek to understand religion as an evolutionary aspect of the brain. In this view, religious expressions and actions, including texts and rituals, are based on unconscious cognitive processes. Research on metaphors has also been influenced by cognitive science and thus forms one, albeit by no means the only or most important, intellectual background for the CRC (see chapter *Conceptual Considerations II: Understanding Metaphor in a Religious Context*). A third [22]

scholarly path, *material religion* (and its German sibling *Religionsästhetik*), criticizes a bias on religious texts and language in earlier decades of the discipline (see, for instance, Koch and Wilkens 2020; Grieser and Johnston 2017). The approach is influenced by anthropological and archaeological studies of religion (see, e.g., Bielo 2015; Droogan 2013). It includes non-textual aspects of religion, including images, artifacts, rituals, and sensory experiences such as seeing, smelling, feeling, etc. This is closely related to a branch of research often called *lived religion*, which centers on the individual subject and its everyday religious actions and expressions (see, for instance, McGuire 2008; regarding the Ancient Mediterranean world: Gasparini et al. 2020). This approach also underlines that everyday religious practices usually do not correspond with canonical texts or regulations issued by religious authorities. Additionally, this perspective is closely related to the *performative turn*, an approach primarily interested in how religion is performed in ritual or vernacular practices (as an overview see Michaels and Sax 2017). Some scholars point out that this—instead of authoritative texts and canonical traditions—should be at the heart of the study of religions.

[23] The *discursive study of religions*, on the other hand, despite all internal differences, shares a focus on how actors in societies talk about religion, be it in textual or audio-visual media. Scholars in this field of study usually do not start with a specific definition of religion, but seek to understand how discourses produce and negotiate a notion of religion and how this is related to positions of power and authority in a given discourse (see. e.g., Johnston and Stuckrad 2021). Itself often grounded in discourse theory and postmodern thought, *gender studies* also contributed to the study of religions in recent years and suggests both critical self-awareness of the researcher's social gender in the production and analysis of data, and, equally importantly, a heightened awareness of religious constructions of gender roles (see, for instance, Cady and Fessenden 2013). Finally, in another turn, which rediscovers some of the phenomenological roots of the study of religion, the *religious experience* of the individual is drawn back into the center of attention. This perspective seeks to understand religious experience at its core, the embodied human being, and has had significant repercussions regarding methods and methodology (see. e.g., Taves 2016; Alston 1991).

[24] All of these approaches are crucial to a vital and constructive discussion in the study of religions in general, and the analysis of religious metaphors in particular. In light of our overarching research question, however, we have opted for the sociological and systems theoretical framework outlined below. A problem that we see in various strands of the research is a tendency to, as it were, either paraphrase religion or explain it away. The former is, at times, the case in religious phenomenology, and religious philosophies, and, in parts, the lived religion approach. Here, some studies seem to take individuals' accounts at face value and recount their narratives—certainly in precise and diligent ways—while not putting enough emphasis on analysis and theorizing. Without more abstract, generalizing perspectives, we fear that getting a better analytical understanding of the constitution and function of metaphors as semiotic processes, as is the aim of this CRC, will not be possible.

[25] When we speak of approaches that 'explain religion away,' we think of a tendency in social science approaches that seem to dissolve religion completely into non-religious factors—i.e., explaining the existence of religion through political, economic, or other factors. This is particularly apparent in studies based on the postcolonial turn. In many such studies, religion is not considered as a sociocultural process in its own right but as something that is 'used' or 'constructed' by people and groups with certain intentions.[4] This would consequently reduce a religious metaphor to a sheer instrument that people use, but we assume that it is more than that. To us, the intrinsic logic of religion is neither congruent with the interests of political power nor with status (such as age, gender, economic situation, ethnic and cultural affiliation, etc.), economic gain, technical management of everyday practical concerns, etc. Cognitive approaches also sometimes tend to explain religion away by ultimately explaining it as neurological and evolutionary processes in the human brain.

Religion as Communication

[26] In our view, the best way to overcome this unsatisfactory alternative of 'paraphrasing vs. explaining away' is to adopt a communication theory approach.[5] Communication theory approaches in the study of religion are guided by the intention to surpass the essentialism of the older phenomenology of religion by understanding religion as a sociocultural fact that is generated through and proceeds as communication. This is what communication theory approaches have in common with the adaptation of discourse theory in religious studies (see, for example, Johnston and Stuckrad 2021; Wijsen and Stuckrad 2016). In addition, they are also compatible with both action theory approaches (Rüpke 2015) and the concept of 'material religion' (Arweck and Keenan 2006; Chidester 2018; Bredholt-Christensen and Jensen 2017; Meyer and Houtman 2012). However, a communication theory approach, as the name suggests, gives priority to religious communication rather than to other concepts such as religious action, religious experience, and religious objects (Krech 2017). From a communication theory perspective, behavior (physical or linguistic) can be considered religious action only if it is addressed as religious and communicatively attributed to an actor. Similarly, mental experience can only be regarded as religious if it is communicated within a religious experience framework. And finally, from the perspective of communication theory, a physical object only has religious significance if it becomes embedded in religious communication *as* a religious object.

[27] Researchers emphasize that communication can be achieved not only through speak-

4 See, e.g., Robert Campany (2003, 319): "Religions do not exist, at least not in the same way that people and their textual and visual artifacts and performances do. And when religions are metaphorically imagined as doing things, it becomes harder to see the agents who really and nonmetaphorically do things: people."

5 See, e.g., Yelle, Handman, and Lehrich (2019); Krech (2017); Lasch (2011); Pace (2011); Palmer, Ellsworth, and Steadman (2009); Rüpke (2015, 2006, 2001); Paul (2009); Strohschneider (2009); Tyrell (2008); Greule and Hackl-Rössler (2006); Stolz (2004); Sawyer and Simpson (2001); Brodersen (2001); Luhmann (1998); Tyrell, Krech, and Knoblauch (1998); Binder and Ehlich (1997); Mensching ([1948] 1983).

ing and writing, but also through shared perception, for example, through *mutually perceived* physical behavior in a ritual. However, perceptual communication already has a "semi-propositional" character (Sperber 1985, 51) and thus takes place in a kind of protolanguage or against the background of a developed verbal language. Last but not least, communication also takes place through artifacts such as images and other visual objects (Bohn 2012), and buildings, for example, can be understood as "heavy communication media" (Fischer 2017). But even in these cases, this type of communication is oriented towards propositional verbal language. It must at least be translated into it to function as communication and to endure in socio-cultural reality.

In the perspective of a sociological systems theory, which is broadly adopted in the CRC, communication, in general, is understood as the interplay of information, utterance, and understanding (Luhmann 1995, 139–50). Information can only be understood if it has semantic content beyond the message and is thus distinguished from the utterance and the person communicating it. This aspect is taken into account in systems theory by differentiating between semantics and social structure (Stichweh 2006). In religious communication, information is understood as religious. The actors to whom communication is attributed are considered religious actors—for example, but certainly not exclusively, in religious roles such as priest, prophet, etc. (Turner 1968). The same applies to the process of communication: It is only religious if the information is identified as religious, for example, in divination, in a ritual, or in a religious organization (Krech 1999, 33–61). From a linguistic point of view, the nature of the utterance can also be expressed in specific genres. In this sense, if the information is defined as religious, there are also specific religious genres, such as prayer, a doxological hymn, prophetic saying, sermon, or religious instruction (Lasch 2011). [28]

Against the background of communication theory, we understand the epistemology of religion (as genitivus subiectivus and obiectivus) differently than is the case in, e.g., action and experience theory approaches. First, religion in our understanding is not primarily concerned with communication from person to person, but rather with communication that emanates from and is addressed to unobservable (i.e., transcendent) beings and forces, which, however, must be represented and communicated by known and thus immanent means. Second, instead of communication between actors (according to the sender-receiver model), religious communication itself comes to the fore. Religious communication may include persons, but addresses them in very different ways than is conventionally assumed (Kippenberg, Kuiper, and Sanders 1990; Assmann and Stroumsa 1999). Persons, then, are not the starting point but rather one of many attributions of religious communication, just as is the case for transcendent actors. If persons are the result of communicative attribution, their motives cannot be the starting point for religious communication. Therefore, the following applies: "It is not motives that explain societal differentiation, but societal differentiation that explains motives. Even and especially in the case of religiously qualified motives, this is so" (Luhmann 1989, 344; our translation). [29]

A concrete communication event establishes an independent causal relationship. It [30]

opens up a scope of action in the sense of the possibility to communicatively address events or parts of them as actions of actors. Consequently, human actors are not the starting point for events but rather a communicative product, often *created metaphorically*—as is the case with physical objects that might be metaphorically considered as acting. The meta-linguistic concept of *agency of objects* points to this (Latour 2005). To understand communication as an independent context of effects means that it does not merge into the mere aggregation of individual, interrelated statements of individual human or non-human actors. It rather emerges as a level of its own.

[31] This view is relevant not only but especially for the study of religion because, very often, something happens in religious communication that is not, or at least not primarily and solely, attributed to human actors in religious self-description. There, quite often, spiritual forces, as well as mediators and superhuman beings (including goddesses or gods), act. This religious agency is essentially created metaphorically. If these were projections of consciousness, it would be impossible to understand how the vivid imaginations of consciousness could come together—except through communication that uses metaphors to refer to the transcendent. For this reason, a communication-theoretical approach is especially appropriate for researching the function and effects of metaphors in religion.

Defining Religion

[32] Our communication theory approach to the study of religion remains hollow without a clear and distinct definition of religion per se, which will, in turn, inform our conceptual thinking on religion in relation to metaphor. The question of how to define religion, of course, has long been the subject of controversial discussion in research—especially in the study of religion.[6] As a result, the corresponding literature is almost unmanageable. One of the most important debates about an appropriate concept of religion relates to whether religion should be determined substantially (= semantically) or functionally. A substantive definition of religion refers to concrete semantics by which religion is characterized, for example, by transcendent beings such as gods and demons or ideas such as life after death. A functional definition of religion, conversely, dispenses with the specification of concrete semantics and defines religion as either a social or psychological function that provides certain services, such as social cooperation or mental well-being. In the CRC, we do not consider the substantial or functional conceptions of religion as mutually exclusive options, but, as we will discuss below, instead combine both possibilities of definition. Much like our communication theory approach, this definition will be grounded in sociological systems theory. From a systems theory perspective, religion, like every sphere (or 'system') of society, has a dual status: As a social fact, religion fulfills a societal function. However, religion can only do this if it simultaneously processes its own conditions internally, generates specific semantics, and follows them without becoming anything other than a social fact (Luhmann 2013). Religion, then, is defined as the form of meaning constitution that deals with ultimate contingency (=

6 For an overview on the literature, see Pollack (2018).

function) based on the transcendence/immanence-distinction (= the system's internal conditions for constituting semantics). We will discuss this definition in more detail in the following.[7]

Functional Definitions of Religion

[33] The extensive discussion on functional definitions of religion has been summarized by Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, who cites the following functions from a literature review: "(1) establishing identity, (2) leading actions / conduct of life, (3) coping with contingency, (4) social integration, (5) cosmization, (6) world distancing" (Kaufmann 1989, 85). In our view, Kaufmann's third option is the most important one: religion is about coping with contingency because identity, action orientation, and the conduct of life are precarious and thus contingent themselves. The other functions he and others mention can be derived from processing contingency and represent specifications. Contingency in a very general sense means that something is as it is but could also be different or not exist at all. Coping with contingency, in general, is thus not exclusive to religion: insurances, law, the health–care system, politics, and even love and partnerships can be understood, at least in part, as strategies to deal with contingency. However, in our understanding, religion represents a special form of coping with contingency, namely coping with *ultimate* contingency. Insurance policies can compensate for the financial consequences of accidents, but they cannot prevent painful events. Wars, epidemics, natural disasters, and accidents happen anyway. Insurances cannot even compensate for the experiences associated with painful circumstances. Medicine does its best but often enough, it cannot prevent or cure illness. Still, even in the case of positive contingency, such as rescue, recovery, avoidance, etc., ways to meaningfully deal with the excess of experience must be found. Technical and social utopias can be a regulative idea for political, legal, and economic processes, but they cannot guarantee corresponding progress; and quite often, they even turn into their opposite. Art and intimate relationships offer possibilities for processing emotional experiences such as grief and happiness—but only to a limited extent, and no one is immune to disappointment ("This art tells me nothing," or "My beloved doesn't understand me."). In short: The experience that the world does not merge into what is available and controllable is omnipresent despite all (socio-)technical fantasies.

[34] Coping with contingency thus has its limits, and this is where religion comes into play. Of course, it does this again and again because the concrete semantic and socio-structural solutions religion offers are themselves contingent. This is the most important paradox of religion and, at the same time, the most potent motor of the dynamics of the history of religion. How individual people deal with contingency is left to them, but social contingency sooner or later leads to religion at the societal level—in the sense of a societal function that establishes an ultimate world horizon with which society can

7 Approaches on religion based on discourse theory also combine semantic and functional aspects. A dispositif is the connection of "power and knowledge" (Foucault [1976] 1978, 73); regarding the application of discourse analysis to research on religion see, for instance, Johnston und Stuckrad (2021).

distinguish itself from its indeterminable counterpart. However, no society can function only with religion—not even in the early stages of societal differentiation—because practical concerns must always be addressed as well. In ancient times, seafarers made sacrifices before and after the voyage, but when steering the ship, they had to rely on nautical expertise and, when setting course, on astronomical data that needs other forms of communication than religion (Eckert 2011). We assume that for every society at any time and in any region, we find religion at work in this basic sense, which includes functional equivalents of what we call religion. This implies some degree of societal differentiation, which can, however, vary immensely. The religious treatment of contingency thus takes on diverse, historically and culturally determined forms in empirical research. Consequently, it is crucial to convey the model of religion with the particularities of concrete religions. In the CRC, the concept of religion serves as the supreme *tertium comparationis* for the comparison of heterogeneous material of the religious use of metaphors. Conversely, empirical, and thus semantic, material provides the basis for the further elaboration of the modeling of religion.

Semantic Definitions of Religion

A problem with purely functional definitions of religion lies in the fact that the function of something alone does not explain its existence: [35]

> […] stating the function of something cannot explain its existence or the structures by means of which it makes itself possible. In particular, a functional explanation that points to needs or advantages in the *environment* does not suffice to explain how the *system* functions. (Luhmann [1997] 2012, 115) [36]

Therefore, it is necessary to combine a functional definition of religion with semantic specifications. In older research on religion, it was common practice to determine religion substantially, that is, semantically. For example, Edward Tylor defined religion as "the belief in Spiritual Beings" (Tylor [1871] 1903, 1:424), such as demons, intermediate beings, and gods. But what about that empirical material that does not feature any such beings but is nevertheless commonly included in the concept of religion (and rightfully so)? Other substantial definitions refer to 'the supernatural'. This term, however, applies to all socio-cultural facts that are not material or physical, so that the concept of religion is inflated.[8] In one case, too little is included in the concept of religion; in the other, too much. In our opinion, Friedrich Max Müller points in the right direction. According to him, religion is "a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite" (Müller [1874] 1893, 14—hinting at the fact that a general definition needs to be formal and cannot derive from individual religious traditions). [37]

In our view, the transcendence/immanence-distinction (TID) is the most theoreti- [38]

8 Émile Durkheim is slightly more specific. He defines the supernatural as "any order of things that goes beyond our understanding; the supernatural is the world of mystery, the unknowable, or the incomprehensible. Religion would then be a kind of speculation upon all that escapes science, and clear thinking generally" ([1912] 1995, 22). However, this would define various emotions as well as art as religious.

cally plausible and empirically evident candidate for the formal determination of religious semantics to date (Pollack 1995; Luhmann 2013, 42–86; Kleine 2012, 2016). As socio-historical precursors and variations, the distinctions known/unknown and familiar/unfamiliar come to mind. As is the case with contingency, the distinction between transcendence and immanence is at work not only in religion but constitutes a basic principle of society and language in general. In a basic sense, transcending is a reference to something that is not in the experience of the here and now. This is due to the transcendent character of language in general as the elementary medium of communication (Rentsch 2003). And this is probably the greatest common denominator of what philosophical anthropology (especially Helmut Plessner 1981), sociology oriented towards social phenomenology (Schütz 1932, 109; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Luckmann 1967; Soeffner 1991, 2010), and pragmatic theory of religion (Joas 2004) understand by transcendence.

[39] To avoid misunderstandings: By transcendence, we do not primarily mean something concretely determined at certain times and in specific cultures, such as a Christian understanding of transcendence, a reference to God, or the localization of paradise in heaven. Instead, we understand it in a very general, modal-theoretical sense. In such an understanding, there are many types of transcendence. Besides religion, there are also sign processes in general, history, sociality (i.e., ego's awareness of alter ego), ideal notions of order, the future, dreams, surprising experiences and events, art, etc.[9] If, however, one does not distinguish between the principle of transcending in general and its religious expression in particular, then everything outside the immediate experience of the here and now is religious.[10] As a result, we would produce an inflationary concept of religion with which nothing can be gained analytically. It is thus useful to distinguish the type of reference to transcendence that is to be called religion from other types of such references in the following way: Religion has to cope with the problem of how transcendence, which cannot be represented *in principle*, is designated by immanent means, i.e., the *principally* absent is turned into the present, the unavailable into the available, the unrepresentable into the representable, or, in communication theory terms: the unsayable can be transformed into the sayable (Schwaderer and Waldner 2020; Liebert 2017).[11] In this way, religion masters the task of "transforming the indeterminacy and indeterminability of the world horizon into determinacy or determinability of a style that can be specified" (Luhmann 1972, 11). In this way, the transcendence/immanence-

9 Thomas Rentsch (2015) distinguishes the following dimensions of transcendence: ontological and cosmological transcendence, human existence, and language.

10 Matthias Jung rightly pointed this out in various ways during his time as a fellow at the Bochum Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religion between Asia and Europe." There is a research debate about whether religious transcendence developed as absolute transcendence in the Axial Age (or in Axial Age cultures); see, for example, Schwartz (1975); Eisenstadt (1986); Árnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock (2005); Bellah (2011); Bellah and Joas (2012).

11 Cf. for instance the Christian theological distinction between apophatic and cataphatic (with reference to images: Karahan 2013, 2016). On the metaphorics of ineffable feeling in contemporary Christian contexts, see Herbrik (2014). The topos of ineffability predisposes to religion, but is not necessarily its object; on the topos of ineffability, for example, in conversations with epilepsy patients, in which there is unspecific talk of an "aura," see Gülich (2005).

distinction is systematically linked to the societal function of ultimately coping with contingency.

To depict transcendence, which cannot be represented in principle, is, of course, a paradoxical[12] task and thus impossible to achieve (the form of religion called mysticism repeatedly draws attention to this; Sells 1994). Because of this impossibility, religion could actually be expected to evaporate completely, so that as a consequence—at least as a social fact—it would no longer exist, and society would not have at its disposal a system that deals with ultimate contingency. Therefore, religion must represent transcendence with immanent signs and, in this way, keep itself within social communication. The necessarily tropical character of religious communication results from this task. It is essentially based on the fact that the transcendent (the absent—in whatever semantic determination) to which religious communication refers is itself not communicable and must therefore be designated by immanent (known, present) means. In religious communication, facts that are considered new and different (e.g., incidents or subjective experiences that are not communicatively captured by established experiential schemata) are made communicable with recourse to the known. The unfamiliar is transformed into the familiar. According to the approach of the planned CRC, religion fulfills this task with the help of metaphors. [40]

Our Working Definition of Religion

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the study of religion is a heterogeneous field. Thus, defining religion in the way we do while following a communication theory approach is far from consensual. For example, action-theoretical approaches in research on religion are based on the intentions and motives of the actors involved (Riesebrodt 2010) and understand religion as the result of negotiation processes among the participants (Hüsken and Neubert 2012). In cognitive science approaches, religion is also not conceptualized in terms of communication but is related to cognitve processes (Schüler 2011).[13] It is also disputed whether a social-scientific definition of religion should refer to transcendence (Josephson-Storm 2017, 120–24). In any case, we are, of course, not suggesting that our definition needs to be generally accepted. Instead, we commit ourselves to a working definition for heuristic purposes: “The project of defining ‘religion’ for the ‘purposes of theorizing’ or for ‘present purposes’ must be distinguished from the project of defining religion once-and-for-all” (Bulbulia et al. 2013, 382). If we were to dispense with a working concept of religion, we would not be able to identify and comparatively analyze metaphors of religion. We understand religion to be [41]

> *the form of communication that has the function of ultimately coping with contingency by means of the transcendence/immanence-distinction.* (Krech 2011, 2021a) [42]

12 Transcendence itself has been called “a highly paradoxical notion” (Campbell 1982, 148).
13 Edith Franke rightly observes that a stronger focus on the cognitive sciences could even become a hindrance for research on religion with a social science orientation (2014, 39).

The commitment to this definition of religion was made in the course of and is, in turn, the result of our joint work in the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe* and has proven itself as paramount *tertium comparationis*, allowing us to compare heterogeneous facts in the history of religions. This working definition of religion provides us with a starting point for investigating the origins and effects of specific religious metaphors. [43]

To reiterate our main point: While the act of transcending is at work everywhere in socio-cultural reality, the reference to transcendence is, in religious terms, the means to deal with contingency that cannot be dealt with otherwise. At the same time, however, religious transcendence is unavailable and indeterminable, so that it must be determined and represented by immanent means to be part of socio-cultural reality. From a religious perspective, transcendence refers to something that is, in principle, unavailable for communication. Therefore, we assume the following: [44]

> In the paradoxical process in religious communication of having to refer to unavailable transcendence by immanent means, the metaphor (with its paradoxical simultaneousness of 'is like' and 'is not' (Ricœur 1978, 6) seems to be of particular importance. In religion, it is used to infer the unknown (target domain) from known means (source domain), and in this way creates religious meaning.* [45]

Conceptual Considerations II: Understanding Metaphor in a Religious Context

In the following, we will first present our working definition of metaphor before briefly discussing some relevant concepts and issues from the field of metaphor studies in light of our research question and overall interest in religion. For the CRC, it makes sense to start working with a rather basic understanding of metaphor that has been tried and tested in various disciplines while at the same time remaining open to adopting more complex and ambivalent conceptualizations wherever useful. In the last sub-chapter, *Metaphors and Literality*, we will expand on our initial thesis and make some additional theoretical claims on religion and metaphor. [46]

A Working Definition of Metaphor

The controversies around the definition of religion in religious studies are mirrored by the debates around the understanding of metaphor in (cognitive) linguistics, philosophy of language, and literary studies (for an overview of the various disciplines involved, see Gehring 2013; for a synthesizing proposal of various theories, Goldmann 2018; on cognitive linguistic research on metaphor, Grady 2007; from the perspective of literary studies, Haverkamp 2007). Janet Soskice (1985, 15) estimated 35 years ago that more than 125 definitions of 'metaphor' had been proposed. Eckard Rolf (2005) tries [47]

to make sense of this diversity by distinguishing between 25 metaphor theories, which he then bundles into four different approaches to the phenomenon. Raymond Gibbs [-gibbsjr_metaphor_2017], somewhat less constructively, even calls the debates around the concept a "metaphor war."

[48] The one thing everyone seems to agree upon is that the 1980 publication of *Metaphors We Live By*, co-authored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, marks a seminal point in the history of the field (see Taverniers 2002). This, of course, does not mean that scholars agree with the concepts and ideas put forward in that work—including Lakoff and Johnson themselves. They have since published multiple clarifications and re-imaginations of said study, both jointly and individually. As discussed below, our own understanding of metaphor in the context of a CRC interested in questions of religion takes into account several different impulses from across the research field. However, as our starting point, and to pave the way for a manageable operationalization, we rely on Lakoff's influential and rather straightforward definition of metaphor:[14]

> [49] "[…] a metaphor is a structural mapping from one domain of subject matter (the source domain) to another (the target domain)." (Lakoff 1986, 294)

Semantic Domains

[50] One crucial element in this definition is the concept of 'domain,' which is defined in research in different ways. In a broader sense, a semantic domain[15] can be understood as

> [51] an organized set of words, all on the same level of contrast, that refer to a single conceptual category, such as kinship terms, animal names, color terms, or emotion terms.[16] (Romney et al. 2000, 518)

[52] In a more sociolinguistic and sociological sense, semantic domains can be understood as

> [53] common areas of human discussion, such as *Economics*, *Politics*, *Law*, *Science*, etc. […], which demonstrate lexical coherence. Semantic Domains are Semantic Fields, characterized by sets of domain words, which often occur in texts about the corresponding domain. (Gliozzo and Strapparava 2009, 20)

[54] To give a simple example: If the leader of a political party is described as a 'pilot' in

14 Older approaches in metaphor theory uses different terms; for instance 'tenor' (for the source domain) and 'vehicle' [for the target domain; see Richards ([1936] 1965), 96]. Harald Weinrich ([1963] 1976, 297) uses the terms *Bildspender* ('vehicle') and *Bildempfänger* ('tenor'). Other approaches distinguish between 'focus' and 'frame.'

15 In older research, the term 'semantic field' (*semantisches Feld*) is used (see, e.g., Trier 1931).

16 Cf. Gliozzo and Strapparava (2009, 13): "Semantic Domains are clusters of terms and texts that exhibit a high level of lexical coherence, i.e., the property of domain-specific words to co-occur together in texts." In linguistic perspective, a semantic domain is defined by the set of semantic values to which syntactic constructs can be assigned. In each case, a semantic domain is the set of all possible outcomes for a given semantic function. In a domain, the meaning of a word is revealed by its

a news article, we have the case of a metaphor in which a concept from the domain of aviation is mapped onto the domain of politics. Of course, rather than 'aviation,' one could also consider this a mapping from a more basic domain, such as 'traffic' or 'transportation,' and rather than 'politics,' one could speak of the domain of, say, 'society' or 'the public sphere.' Such considerations eventually lead to the question of which domains are the most basic or irreducible—a question mirrored in the forming of our research sections.

[55] To add an example from the religious context: The German *Herr* and the English 'Lord,' much as the Latin *dominus*, are used in profane language to denote a master of slaves, a family father, an aristocratic person, etc., but are also used metaphorically in reference to God. It is the same with the Hebrew names of God *ʾādôn(āj)* and *baʿal*, or the Greek *kyrios*. While in these languages, the words do not lose their literal meaning (even though its literal use may become rare), a semantic development of the corresponding words can be observed in Persian, where the meaning progressively shifts from other domains to the religious domain. In Middle Persian, the word *xwadāy* means 'Lord' (there are composites of these, e.g., *kadag-xwadāy* 'master of the house' or *kadag-bānūg* as the female variant). This word is then used metaphorically in New Persian as a designation of the God. As a result, the semantic meaning of the word indefinitely shifts from 'Lord' to GOD, hence from the domain of social hierarchy to the religious domain, and the new meaning becomes the most widespread and ordinary meaning of the New Persian *ḫodā (< xwadāy)*.

[56] Moving to the Chinese context for a second example, we can see another process of metaphorization that takes place from the source domain of political semantics to the religious domain. The original meaning of the verb zhi 治 was 'to bring watercourses under control'; hence the political connotation of 'to govern' in the sense of 'to control.' Already in the last centuries BCE, the literal meaning was transferred to other areas, as exemplified in the cases of 'governing the heart' (治心) or 'governing the self' (治己) (Xunzi 21; Fayan 3). Of particular importance, then, is the case of the word dao 道, the name of the highest principle in Daoism. In early texts, that character is interchangeable with the verb dao 導—'to dig a channel for the watercourse' (Allan 1997, 68). Over time, 'dao' gained the meaning of a 'path that (one) walks' (Shuowen jiezi) and consequently gained the connotation of 'highest principle.'

Mapping and Blending

[57] Turning back to the definition of metaphor mentioned earlier, a second term that needs to be briefly discussed in addition to 'domain' is 'mapping,' especially in relation to the alternative (or rather: complementary) concept of 'blending.'[17] Mapping, in simple terms, is the process in which a source and a target domain are connected by way of explaining

position in relation to the other words in that domain. Due to the mapping of one semantic domain onto another, "the tension typical of metaphors is created by a kind of meaning collision or absurdity, a semantic contradiction or category mistake" (Kompa 2015, 342; our translation).

17 See the instructive article by Eder (2007) for an overview on the consequences in the field of literary studies.

aspects of the target domain in terms of the source domain. In approaches centered on the concept of 'blending' (Fauconnier and Turner 2002), however, it is assumed that various processes of mapping take place on different levels at the same time. In their concept of blending, Fauconnier and Turner understand what is called source and target domain in mapping approaches as two coequal 'input spaces' and add "a 'generic' space, representing conceptual structure that is shared by both inputs, and the 'blended' space, where material from the inputs combines and interacts" (Grady, Oakley, and Coulson 1999, 103).

[58] The idea of metaphor as a multidirectional process has some merits. First, it helps to shed light on the fact that it is not only religious language which is fed by semantics from other domains, but it can also, conversely, provide semantics that are used elsewhere—e.g., when a politician who creates a sense of optimism in the populace is hailed as a 'messiah.' To return to our two examples, it is worth mentioning that the Iranian words *baga-/bay* show a reverse semantic development to *xwadāy/ẖodā*. The Old Persian word *baga-* was used in the old Persian inscriptions in the meaning GOD. Its Central Persian counterpart, *bay*, however, takes on the additional meaning of LORD through the metaphorical use of the word for the Parthian and Sassanid kings. In Chinese, the word di 帝, from the third century B.C.E. onwards, denoted the 'emperor,' whose etymon, in turn, is associated with deified ancestors. Thus, 帝 brings together "the related strands of Chinese conceptions of transcendent, origin, paternity, authority, and power" (Yu 2009, 321). Nevertheless, the word remained a common term for different types of deities. The examples show how, in a metaphorical process, patrimonial semantics are applied to gods or a god and, vice versa, political rulers are deified.

[59] Second, and more to the point, blending approaches can help to demonstrate how metaphors can work both ways, not only over time but *in actu*, i.e., in the very process of blending. This is what Bruno Snell ([1946] 1953, 199–200) has in mind when he writes:

> [60] If the rock contributes to the understanding of a human attitude, i.e. if a dead object elucidates animate behaviour, the reason is that the inanimate object is itself viewed anthropomorphically; the immobility of the boulder in the surf is interpreted as endurance, as a human being endures in the midst of a threatening situation. It appears, therefore, that one object is capable of casting fresh light upon another in the form of a simile, only because we read into the object the very qualities which it in turn illustrates. […] Thus it is not quite correct to say that the rock is viewed anthropomorphically, unless we add that our understanding of the rock is anthropomorphic for the same reason that we are able to look at ourselves petromorphically […].

[61] This direction is also prominently evident in the following quotation from the New Testament: "You are Peter [Πέτρος], and on this rock [Ancient Greek: πέτρα] I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). And in Dt 32:18, God himself is petrified: "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth."[18]

18 Both quotes after the "Revised Standard Version."

As indicated above, we consider Lakoff's definition of metaphor based on the idea of mapping between source and target domain a useful starting point for our work. This does not stop us from continually rethinking it in the course of the CRC, and, where necessary, integrating alternative or complementary understandings, such as the blending approach, over time. More importantly, regardless of whether one understands the formation of a metaphor as mapping or blending, a metaphor always combines domains. The two approaches are thus not conflicting, mutually exclusive approaches but complementary aspects of metaphor theory—as their two most prominent proponents have themselves emphasized (Fauconnier and Lakoff 2009). The concept of blending does justice to the important fact that the formation of a metaphor is not unidirectional. However, we continue to speak of source and target domains because we are specifically interested in how religion transfers semantics from other domains qua metaphor into religious meaning. [62]

Put differently, through establishing new meaning by relating two semantic domains that are not usually connected, metaphors have a "split reference" (Ricœur 1978, 265; with reference to Jakobson 1960, 371). The paradox of the metaphor consists of including the literal 'is not' in the metaphorical 'is' (Ricœur 1978, 6). Research on religious metaphors thus enables us to do two things: On the one hand, we can analyze the ontologies of semantic domains for their semantic concretions in diachronic and culturally synchronic comparison. On the other hand, we can understand how different domains are 'bridged' by metaphors creating a new unit in the process. This twofold research opportunity is particularly relevant for religious concepts of time (e.g., ritual presence as a unit of before and after; for the case of Zoroastrian rituals, see Rezania 2010), cosmologies (e.g., unitary terms for the distinction between chaos and order, such as, for example, creation as a unity of the difference between chaos and order; for the case of Egyptian religion, see Assmann 2005, 34); anthropologies (e.g., the unity of body and mind in the religious concept of the whole human being; Janowski 2012; or the soul; e.g., Feld 2013; Bremmer 2012; Gladigow 1993); survival, reincarnation, or resurrection as a unity of the difference between life and death (see, e.g., Zander 1999); and concepts of society (e.g., the foundation of social order by goddesses and gods; or a monotheistic god as a unit of ethnic and political difference) of epistemological significance. In short: [63]

> *Because the metaphor presupposes the existence of different domains as its reference, we can understand what the emergence of religious meaning responds to when we examine the conceptual relationship between source and target domains in religious metaphors.* [64]

Abstract and Concrete

Another idea that can be found already in Lakoff's and Johnson's work is that metaphors typically explain more abstract phenomena by using more concrete reference points, i.e., the mapping works from a more concrete source domain onto a more abstract target domain (Lakoff and Johnson [1980] 2003, 115). At first glance, this easily fits [65]

our conception of metaphors in religious communication because, according to our thesis, the transcendent (target domain), which in principle cannot be represented and is therefore abstract, is represented by immanent, concrete means (source domain).

[66] It is worth mentioning, however, that in parallel to what has been discussed above with regards to blending approaches, we expect to find more complex scenarios in our empirical material than such general assumptions may seem to implicate. Specifically, we assume that to the extent that religious semantics is sedimented (i.e., that which might be considered abstract in the above logic), it becomes concrete. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, 'God speaks' as a matter of course, and this fact is not (anymore or again) recognizable as a metaphor. From the perspective of sedimented religious semantics, even facts that are usually more or less in the immediate grasp of human experience can appear in a different light. For example, hearing and seeing as sensual processes of the everyday world can be questioned and, via the transcendence/immanence-distinction, can be transformed into religious meaning. This happens, for example, in auditions and visions. The same applies to religiously determined experiences outside of everyday life. In everyday experience, 'falling asleep' is connoted with the spatial metaphor of sinking or falling. When falling asleep, the body muscles relax and thus trigger the feeling of falling or sinking. In a religiously coded extraordinary experience, on the other hand, this everyday experience may be thwarted, and, for example, floating, rising, or flying are symbolized (Krech 2021b). Although this movement comes from the physical domain, it is contrasted with the force of gravity. The religiously coded extraordinary experience can be described just as concretely with this symbolization as the experience of sinking or falling asleep. Two of the characteristics of metaphors (Ortman 2000) can thus be reversed in religious communication, namely directionality and the principle of experience. According to this, the source domain is based on concrete, physical experience, while the target domain is more abstract. All in all, the difference between source and target domain is not necessarily and exclusively that between abstract and concrete but just as much that between unfamiliar and familiar.

Metaphors and Literality

[67] If the above considerations indicate how we understand the function of metaphors in the emergence of religious meaning, the additional question arises how religious meaning is processed, i.e., how it is perpetuated communicatively once it has been produced. We assume that religion first draws semantic energy from other domains, this semantics is then processed internally, and finally sediments through repeated religious use. Religious language—like any language—is not simply 'there,' but must be communicatively (i.e., socially) activated and reproduced.

[68] Here, our thesis is that the metaphorical cannot—or at least not without considerable costs for religious communication (from silence to its dissolution)—always and permanently be thematized as metaphorical. While it is possible, albeit not necessarily common, to identify metaphors as metaphors in other areas—including in religious

reflection, e.g., in theology—this is not possible in religious practice itself.[19] Furthermore, a unique feature of the religious, as opposed to other socio-cultural areas, comes into play here: While the power of metaphor to constitute social meaning works everywhere, religion is particularly dependent on the fact that it can never literally describe its reference—ultimate transcendence. It must therefore use metaphors, and it must adhere to these metaphors. Thus, metaphors used in religion are 'absolute metaphors' in the sense of Hans Blumenberg.[20] At the same time, however, the religious question of truth cannot be left permanently in the metaphorical, since the social function of religion, according to our working definition, consists in the ultimate processing of contingency.

Consequently, we assume that in religious practice (e.g., in religious ritual or in narratives of direct religious experience), religion dissolves the simultaneity of 'is' and 'is not' (Ricœur 1978, 6), which is constitutive for the metaphor, in favor of the 'is.'[21] Otherwise, religion could neither stabilize nor exercise the social function of dealing with ultimate contingency. By integrating the 'is not' into the 'is like' of the religious metaphor, the result of the metaphorical mapping is that the elements of the non-religious source domain are endowed with religious meaning and then wholly incorporated into the religious domain. In religious practice, thus, religious communication brings to a standstill its constitutive paradox, namely to represent transcendence with immanent means. [69]

However, the suspension of metaphor is not total. Rather, the metaphorical is continuously replaced by other metaphors—ad infinitum. The visibility of one metaphor is thus obscured by another metaphor. Otherwise, religious communication would tend—as a consequence of the unsayable—to vanish into silence. For example, the metaphor 'God speaks' may be replaced by the metaphor 'Scripture says.' Communication of religious meaning can also be maintained through the negation of religious metaphors. This strategy is often used in negative theology (Nientied 2010) and in certain types of mysticism. It is also at work, e.g., in the metaphor of *deus absconditus* (the hidden God) and the silence of God (Korpel and Moor 2011). Although the negation of religious metaphors does not usually go along with an explicitly oppositional stance towards metaphors per se, corresponding formulations are also not determined expressly as metaphor and unfolded metaphorically. Negated metaphors are, as it were, 'metaphors of retreat.' [70]

When we assume that the metaphorical quality of religious meaning is obscured in religious practice, we do not, as indicated, mean to suggest that there is no reflection going on within religious traditions about metaphors and metaphoricity. On the contrary: Precisely because religion cannot leave unanswered whether something is to be understood metaphorically or not, it cannot keep up the simultaneousness of 'is like' and 'is not' that constitutes metaphoric language. The history of religion is full of internal, theological reflections on this issue. We can only illustrate this here with a few examples: [71]

19 See Huebner (1984) as well as Woods, Fernández, and Coen (2012).

20 See Blumenberg ([1960] 2010, 7): "[…] metaphors can […] be *foundational elements* of philosophical language, 'translations' that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicality. If it could be shown that such translations, which would have to be called 'absolute metaphors', exist, then one of the essential tasks of conceptual history (in the thus expanded sense) would be to ascertain and analyze their conceptually irredeemable expressive function."

21 With regards to biblical purification rituals, see Klawans (2000, 33; our translation): "[…] when purity language is used metaphorically, then no real defilement or purification is actually taking place."

Theologian Eberhard Jüngel concludes: “God himself can only be addressed metaphorically. So God is actually only spoken of when he is spoken of metaphorically” (1974, 112; our translation). Long before, Nikolas of Kues noted: “In recognition [the intellect unfolds] an allegorical world, which lies folded in it, through allegorical characteristics and signs” [Nikolaus von Kues (1999), 49; our translation). Theologian Armin Kreiner counters this as follows: [72]

> The thesis that all talk of God is metaphorical […] seems to have to be rejected for the same reason that the doctrine of analogy was criticized. Like an analogy, a metaphor must be translatable at least to some extent into literal speech in order to gain semantic meaning and be understood. If this were excluded in principle, the metaphor would remain incomprehensible. The fact that metaphors are usually understood is related to the fact that the similarities have been discovered to which the speaker wants to refer. Understanding these similarities, however, means nothing more than beginning to translate the metaphor into literal speech. […] To recognize the similarities means to have translated the metaphor in part. For this reason, metaphors are parasitic with respect to literal speech. (Kreiner 2006, 96–98; our translation) [73]

Similar discussions about the relationship between metaphoricity and literality also occur in other religions, for instance, in Islam. In the Karramiyya tradition, e.g., the terms used for God in the he Qur’an (such as ‘hand,’ ‘face.’ and ‘eye’) are understood literally. Adherents of the Muʿtazili school, conversely, are against such anthropomorphism (*tašbīh*) and understand these terms metaphorically. In Ashʿarism, then, it is argued that these terms are to be taken amodally, thus neither metaphorically nor literally, but should be accepted ‘without asking how’ *(bi-lā kaif)* (see Ess 1997, 373–424). [74]

A further example from Zoroastrianism: The Zoroastrian text *Wīdēwdād* (8.16–18) prescribes leading a “four-eyed” dog onto the path of the corpse to exorcise the demons after the body has been carried out of the house. This four-eyedness of the dog is interpreted differently in Indian and Iranian Zoroastrianism. The Indian tradition interprets it as a physical characteristic—the dog should have two spots above the eyes. The Iranian tradition interprets it as the mental ability of the dog to look into the hereafter and thus does not demand a special physical characteristic of the dog appearing in the ritual (cf. Stausberg 2004, 3:455). [75]

The alternative between a literal and a metaphoric reading of a given passage is relevant in theological discourse (for a brief overview, see Alston 2005, 236–39). In the study of religion, however, religious communication is not to be maintained but analyzed. Metaphor and literality, polysemy and unambiguity oscillate in religious communication, which ranges from practical execution (e.g., in experience, prayer, ritual, divination) to reflection (e.g., in theology). In immediate religious practice, the metaphor is understood literally. In religious reflection, it can (but does not have to) become thematic as a metaphor. From an outside perspective, religious communication works through transforming ordinary language into religious language via metaphor and then [76]

treating the result of this transformation as literal. However, if religious communication stopped there, it would not be able to develop further and could never enrich itself with new meaning. This is one of the main reasons why religious currents described as fundamentalist, which are characterized by a strict literalism (Riesebrodt [1990] 1998), are conservative in their semantics.

Conceptual Considerations III: Moving Towards Operationalization

[77] The CRC's methodological workbench and specific methodic tools—some of which are being developed in the CRC as part of our research program—are presented and discussed in a forthcoming *Metaphor Paper* by Stefanie Dipper and Frederik Elwert. In the following, we will thus limit our presentation to more general considerations that, as it were, bridge the conceptual framework and its concrete operationalization.

Metaphor as Conceptual Metaphor

[78] The often-cited foundational work of Lakoff and Johnson ([1980] 2003) was already mentioned above. Taking our point of departure from this work, we are going to look at metaphors from a specific perspective: While in a first, preliminary approach, we can describe a metaphor as a particular verbal or stylistic expression (a linguistic trope or figure), we are primarily interested in the formal semantic relation enclosed in this verbal expression. This formal relation which, following Lakoff, we call *conceptual metaphor,* is what we try to disclose by our linguistic analysis. This focus on conceptual metaphors has also led us to extend the scope of our analysis beyond what is conventionally considered as metaphor. For not only (stylistic) metaphors but also comparisons and similes can be the linguistic expressions of a (conceptual) metaphor. While we do study linguistic expression, we are mainly interested in the conceptual mappings that inform it. In methodological terms, we follow the considerations laid out in the MIPVU guidelines (2010; Steen, Dorst, et al. 2010), which—in contrast to the older MIP (Praggeljaz Group 2007)—includes both rhetorical devices, metaphor and simile, as indirect and direct metaphor.

[79] From a literary perspective, this concentration on conceptual metaphors may, in a sense, appear somewhat reductive: The metaphoric expressions we encounter in texts or speech are often more colorful and elaborate than the conceptual terms we extract from them in the linguistic analysis. For our work in the CRC, however, this way of proceeding offers an important gain: For the conceptual metaphors present our findings in a more abstract form, which is, to a certain extent, detached from the concrete and peculiar shape of a metaphoric phrase in a particular language or idiom. This allows us to relate to each other and to compare our results across the boundaries of very different languages and cultures. Moreover, the conceptual metaphors provide a format which is accessible and suitable for computational analysis. Thus, the linguistic data can be further worked

on and processed by digital tools. This does not mean, however, that the rich variety of figurative expressions we encounter in our texts gets lost. The different forms and variants of metaphoric expressions will be considered in the individual subprojects by means of complementary philological approaches.

Metaphor as a Communicative Device

[80] Understanding metaphor as a *conceptual* mapping does not necessarily imply understanding it primarily in terms of a *cognitive* process. Conceptual metaphor theory is often situated in a cognitive science approach, but there is also criticism targeted at the lack of empirical evidence of cognitive processes corresponding to conceptual mappings.[22] We do not take sides in this debate because the relation between metaphor and cognition is not vital for our approach. Our understanding of religion as a socio-cultural fact centers on *communication* as the means of social meaning production. Consequently, we also approach metaphor primarily as a communicative device. Metaphor is defined by conceptual mappings, but these are studied as they manifest in communication and structure further communicative acts. Cameron and Deignan (2003) introduced a discourse approach to metaphor that couples conceptual and linguistic considerations and is able to explain empirical observations that a purely conceptual framework cannot. We follow their empirical focus on metaphor use in communication. At this point, we deliberately do not make statements about the psychological and cognitive processes that might or might not be involved in the reception and production of metaphor in communication. However, we believe a dialogue between cognitive and communicative approaches can be fruitful for future extensions of our approach, an avenue that is pioneered in one of the CRC's subprojects (subproject B05: "Embodiment Outside the Body? Out-of-Body Experiences in a Cognitive and Social Science Perspective").

Deliberate Metaphor

[81] Closely related to viewing metaphor as a communicative device is a focus on deliberate metaphor. Grounded in his interest in discourse psychology, Steen, like Cameron and Deignan (2003), stresses the fact that metaphor use in language is not just representative of conceptual mappings but a communicative act:

> [82] metaphors are always part of utterances that are typically small psychological and social acts in encompassing moves and transactions between writers and readers, or speakers and listeners. This requires a three-dimensional model for metaphor, in which its linguistic, conceptual, and communicative aspects are all taken into account. (Steen 2011, 87)

[83] Steen argues that most metaphors used in language go unseen, i.e., they are not recognized and reflected upon as metaphors. He distinguishes deliberate metaphors in

22 See, e.g., Steen et al. (2010, 2): "[…] most metaphorical expressions in language may have nothing to do with thought, but are a matter of lexical semantics which can be historically explained."

this regard: “Deliberate metaphors differ from non-deliberate metaphors in that they involve mandatory attention to the fact that they are metaphorical” (2011, 84). Deliberate metaphors, he argues, are of special importance for communication and communication constitutes is a third dimension of metaphor in addition to thought and language (2011, 86).

[84] Because the CRC focuses on this communicative aspect of metaphor, deliberate metaphors are of primary concern for us. It is important to stress that “deliberate metaphor is not necessarily the same as conscious metaphor” (2011, 85). Instead, deliberate metaphor draws attention to the fact that it maps two separate domains, and thus holds the potential to be addressed as metaphorical in cognition and/or communication. We thus see deliberate metaphor as a fruitful concept, even when used in the context of a communication model that is agnostic with regard to cognitive processes.

Metaphor Schemas

[85] Metaphors are more than just conceptual mappings that are represented by single linguistic expressions. As meaning-making devices, metaphors have the potential to invoke further metaphors. This is partly because metaphors are, in many cases, not just mappings between two concepts, but can act as *schemas* that provide additional *slots*, which can be filled explicitly or implicitly (Lakoff and Turner 1989, 63–65). E.g., when the church is metaphorically referred to as a ship, this does not only entail the conceptual metaphor organizations are vessels but also provides slots for the sea, sailors, or a helmsman. Not all slots will be explicitly filled, and not all potentially available slots might even be implied. But metaphorical schemas provide the possibility of extending a metaphor in subsequent communication by the same or a different speaker.

[86] Cameron et al. use the term ‘systematic metaphor’ to designate trajectories of metaphor use by one speaker that taken together form an overarching conceptual structure (2009). Their approach is explicitly empirical: Instead of describing the potential slots that a conceptual schema provides, it starts from the data and re-constructs systematic metaphor use from there. Similarly, the MetaNet project addressed the question with a construction grammar approach and built a repository of formal frames and metaphors that make use of them (David et al. 2014).

Extended Metaphor and Allegory

[87] Related to the concept of systematic metaphor is the concept of extended metaphor. If a metaphorical image is used and elaborated in continuous spans of text, often filling out multiple slots of the same schema, one can speak of an extended metaphor. Usually, extended metaphor will also be deliberate, as it makes its metaphoricity visible. Still, an extended metaphor contains references to both source and target domain.

[88] It is important to distinguish between extended metaphor and allegory: Extended narratives that draw from source domain vocabulary but implicitly contain statements about a target domain. While allegory is often compared to ‘super-extended metaphor,’

Crisp (2008) argues that it is fundamentally different. On the empirical level, the distinction is quite straightforward: “While extended metaphor involves both source-related and target-related language, allegory involves only source-related language” (2008, 291).[23] But this has far-reaching consequences for the ontological status of allegory: While metaphors relate two distinct domains and thus create blended conceptual spaces, allegories describe fictional situations. These, according to Crisp, have “the logical status of a possible situation” (2008, 292).

[89] When empirically reconstructing conceptual mappings underlying a concrete metaphorical expression, this creates substantial difficulties: While metaphors, even extended ones, include aspects of both source and target domain and thus at least provide hints about the conceptual mapping, the mapping that informs an allegory remains implicit. On the surface level, an allegory could just be a fictional story. The fact that it contains a second, implicit level of meaning can only be deduced from contextual knowledge (e.g., the pragmatic usage). In some cases, the text itself provides a narrative frame that guides the interpretation of the embedded allegorical story. This can help identify a metaphorical schema that informs the allegory. But even in these instances, it remains unclear which parts of the narrative are to be interpreted as slots in the schema and which have purely decorative functions on the level of the source domain narrative. Other allegories do not provide this kind of framing, making interpretation rely purely on contextual background knowledge.

[90] Religious texts regularly make use of both metaphor and allegory. Prominent examples of allegories are some of the parables of Jesus in the New Testament (e.g., Mk 4, 1–20). But other religious traditions also make use of allegory. The character of allegory as a fictional situation poses additional difficulties in religious contexts: From a scientific perspective, many religious statements can be classified as fictional. Interpreting the narrative function of allegory in religious communication thus requires a distinction between those ‘fictional’ elements that are thought to be ‘real’ in the religious world view (e.g., the miracles) and those ‘fictional’ elements that are meant to be read as fictional within a religious text in order to make statements about another domain.

[91] Even if we identify elements of religious texts that are to be read as non-literal, this does not necessarily imply a conceptual mapping. Instead, these elements can have a symbolic function that points at another layer of meaning without being metaphorical.

[92] Take for example this passage of the *Zhuangzi*:

> [93] (…) 藐姑射之山，有神人居焉，肌膚若冰雪，淖約若處子，不食五穀，吸風飲露。乘雲氣，御飛龍，而遊乎四海之外。

> [94] (…) there is a Holy Man living on faraway Gushe Mountain, with skin like ice or snow and gentle and shy like a young girl. He doesn’t eat the five grains

23 In this sharp distinction, Crisp departs from classical conceptualizations of allegory and metaphor, which form more of a continuum and regard allegory as a form of extended metaphor. Classical authors distinguish between allegories that do contain target-domain language (allegoriae permixtae apertis) and ‘total’ allegories (allegoriae totae, cf. Quintilian, Inst. or. VIII 6,47–48). Only the latter would fit Crisp’s definition of allegory.

> but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas. (Translation Watson [1968] 2013, 4)

The first part contains two similes that express conceptual metaphors: The Holy Man's appearance (skin) and attitude (shyness) are described by referring to different domains. The second part, however, contains a fictional setting. The text passage itself does not reveal the ontological status nor the narrative function of the statements: Are these to be taken as real within a religious world-view? Climbing on clouds and riding dragons might be imaginable activities for a Holy Man. Or are these metaphorical? If so, what is the target domain that the concepts of cloud or dragon are mapped onto? Or is the passage to be read as neither real nor metaphorical but symbolical? Wind and dew, clouds and dragons might refer to nothing concrete except the extraordinary qualities of said man. [95]

Metaphor and Other Forms of Religious Meaning Construction

It is important to note that while our guiding hypothesis assumes a crucial role of metaphor as a means of bridging the transcendent-immanent gap in religious meaning construction, metaphor is not the *only* form to achieve this. Symbolism is another way, as are rhetorical devices like the paradox. E.g., in many Buddhist schools, paradox plays a vital role in conveying information about the transcendent. These rhetorical devices may contribute significantly to religious meaning construction but not via conceptual mappings. In other words, our research does not aim at understanding *all* ways in which religious communication refers to transcendence via immanent means but specifically at understanding the role of metaphor in these processes. [96]

Distinctions between metaphor, allegory and other kinds of non-literal language tend to be complex, and readings of a passage may vary. However, methodologically, we follow these principles: [97]

1. In principle, allegory is of interest to the work of the CRC, as it expresses conceptual mappings and potentially contributes to religious meaning construction. It is thus relevant for the guiding research questions. [98]

2. Empirically, we focus on instances of allegory that provide hints for interpretation, e.g., through narrative frames or passages where allegory merges with extended metaphor. This does not strictly exclude allegories that can only be interpreted by contextual knowledge, but it follows our aspiration for textually grounded interpretation.

3. Instances of non-literal language that do not work via domain mappings are not at the center of our research. While there are significant edge cases where a clear distinction is not possible, we emphasize this distinction when analyzing metaphor in contrast to other forms of non-literal meaning.

Collaboration Based on a Mixed-Methods Approach

It almost goes without saying that analyzing metaphors in religious language in a diachronic and culturally comparative way would not be possible in individual projects, let alone in research conducted by a single researcher. For this reason, the format of a CRC is particularly well suited to the purpose of this research endeavor because it allows individual projects requiring specific expertise related to specialized subject areas to be carried out while at the same time ensuring that these are integrally coordinated. [99]

In asking how metaphors work in religious language, as outlined in our conceptual considerations, the planned CRC has at its core a research question derived from the field of religious studies. However, any attempt to answer this question is dependent on the participation of other disciplines. Our CRC thus brings together expertise from various approaches and disciplines: from the material history of religion and systematic religious studies, the philologies, various cultural studies, (computational) linguistics, the philosophy of language, and literary studies. These disciplines, in turn, while directly contributing to answering our common research question, also have their own perspectives on the question and pursue their own subject-specific sub-questions. [100]

As an undertaking in the humanities, the work in the CRC is essentially interpretive. Through systematic reading, meaning is reconstructed from text. The work is guided by theory and methods but cannot be limited to the processing of methodological protocols. The humanities method of hermeneutics remains central to the acquisition of knowledge. For two reasons, however, hermeneutics is embedded in a larger methodological context: for reasons of comparability between the subprojects, which makes the joint development of a thesaurus of religious metaphors possible in the first place, and for reasons of enrichment of the hermeneutic work itself. By including further perspectives on the text, the interpretative work in the subprojects is stimulated and a common methodological view is practiced. In addition to the hermeneutic-qualitative text work, computer-aided methods such as annotation, corpus linguistic tools, and methods from computational linguistics (especially computational semantics) are therefore used—partly obligatorily, partly optionally. [101]

It is essential to maintain a balance between the different needs of the subprojects (including the rationale of the respective discipline) on the one hand and comparability in the sense of integral cooperation on the other. The subprojects each have their specific research questions, the material differs in type and scope, and the participating researchers are anchored in different scholarly traditions. Therefore, the overall project must also allow for a pluralism of methods appropriate to the subject and question at hand. At the same time, results concerning the overall question and synergies deriving from the comparison of the subprojects' results are only possible if certain methodological assumptions but also concrete work formats and tools are shared. This is especially true for the joint work on a Thesaurus of Religious Metaphors (TRM), which requires both certain infrastructural decisions and agreement on questions of metaphor identification and annotation (see the forthcoming Metaphor Paper by Dipper and Elwert for more details). [102]

The CRC is thus more than a sum of its parts. It is based on a concept more integral, more dependent on cooperation, and therefore in some ways more ambitious than often found in collaborative projects in the Humanities. It is our hope and aim to live up to this ambition in the years to come. With the fantastic team we have in Bochum, we dare to be optimistic. [103]

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