

Press release

Kwame Anthony Appiah is the new Hans Blumenberg Professor

US philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah talks in Münster about how religions shape identities – Evening lecture on 13 June about identity and social belonging – Appiah: Religious identity is revealed as an activity, not a thing. And it's the nature of activities to bring change.

Münster, 3 June 2024 (exc) The US philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah is the new Hans Blumenberg Professor at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster. He will speak at the Cluster next week about identity and social belonging, and discuss the question of how religions shape identities. This was announced by the speaker of the Cluster of Excellence, Michael Seewald. “Appiah’s aim is to rethink identity, a project in which religion plays a central role and is at the same time subject to a philosophical critique.” The evening lecture on 13 June 2024 is entitled “Ways of Belonging: Religion as Creed, as Practice... and as Identity”.

The event begins at 6.15 pm and will take place in Münster in the lecture theatre of the Cluster of Excellence, room JO1, Johannisstraße 4. Participation via Zoom is possible by registering until the day of the lecture at: veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de. The Cluster of Excellence appoints to the Blumenberg Professorship international scholars with cutting-edge research, who bring innovative ideas to Münster.

The recipient of many awards, Kwame Anthony Appiah, was born in 1954 in London and grew up in Ghana. After studying philosophy and earning his doctorate from the University of Cambridge he taught at Yale, Cornell, Duke, and Harvard universities, before moving to Princeton University in 2002. Since 2014, he has been Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University. Appiah’s works include *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press 2005) and *The Lies That Bind* (Profile Books 2018). At the Cluster of Excellence, Appiah will also discuss with researchers his idea of cosmopolitanism and his approach to deconstructing identities of creed, colour and class.

“The things that are called ‘religions’ are so diverse that it sometimes seems there is little point in giving them that single label”, says Appiah. Religions are bearers of creeds, they are associated with practices of everyday life, including performances of gender, and they can bring belief and affect together in powerful ways. In his Hans Blumenberg Lecture, Kwame Anthony Appiah considers the ways in which the complex phenomena we call religions shape identities. “Once you think of credal identities in terms of mutable practices and communities rather than sets of immutable beliefs, religion becomes more verb than noun: the identity is revealed as an activity, not a thing. And it’s the nature of activities to bring change”, Appiah argues. This understanding of religious belonging facilitates the critique of approaches which claim that the true nature of a religion lies in its fundamental, sacred scriptures or its dogmatic texts rather than in the social world of its adherents, an error that Appiah calls the “source-code fallacy”. Appiah’s aim is to rethink identity, a project in which religion plays a central role and is at the same time subject to a philosophical critique. (fbu/vvm)

Hans Blumenberg Professorship for Religion and Politics

The “Hans Blumenberg Professorship for Religion and Politics” is named after Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996), a philosopher who worked at the University of Münster. It is intended to deepen interdisciplinary discussion at the Cluster of Excellence and to bring innovative ideas from international research to Münster. The professorship has been held in recent years by Sarah Stroumsa (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel), Linda Woodhead (Lancaster University, UK), Maribel Fierro (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, Spain), Jóhann Páll Árnason (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), and Mark Juergensmeyer (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA).

About Kwame Anthony Appiah

Kwame Anthony Appiah was born in 1954 in London and grew up in Ghana. After studying philosophy and earning his doctorate from the University of Cambridge he taught at Yale, Cornell, Duke, and Harvard universities, before moving to Princeton University in 2002. At Princeton, he was the Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy and had appointments at the University Center for Human Values, as well as being associated with the Center for African American Studies, the Programs in African Studies and Translation Studies, and the Departments of Comparative Literature and Politics. Since 2014, he has been Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University, where he teaches both in New York and in Abu Dhabi and at other NYU global centers. Kwame Anthony Appiah holds various honorary doctorates from universities around the world. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. In 2022 he was elected as President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. (exc)

Blumenberg Lecture by Kwame Anthony Appiah “Ways of Belonging: Religion as Creed, as Practice ... and as Identity” (lecture in English)

Thursday, 13 June 2024, 6.15 pm, Lecture theatre of the Cluster of Excellence, Room JO 1, Johannisstraße 4, 48143 Münster

Register to participate via Zoom: veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de

Images: Poster for the Hans Blumenberg Lecture (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.