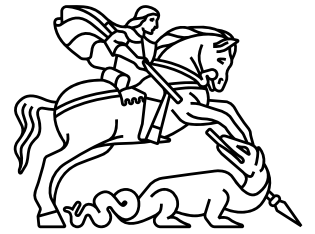


Call for Papers
Deadline: 15 January 2026



Academic Freedom and the Challenges of Humanism(s)

This conference explores the evolving concept of academic freedom from a global and interdisciplinary perspective. It begins by clarifying that academic freedom is distinct from freedom of speech. Academic freedom entails the right to critically examine the very structures and categories that shape our societies. It includes the liberty to pursue research not necessarily aligned with market logic or state interests, but grounded in the curiosity, creativity, and serendipity that drive the pursuit of knowledge.

The conference has a threefold aim. First, it will assess the status of academic freedom across different geopolitical contexts. What is the current condition of academic freedom in Europe, the United States, Russia, China, Middle East, and African countries? We invite empirical studies that document and analyze the specific challenges faced in these and other regions.

Second, we will examine the political dimensions of academic freedom. Who or what are its adversaries? What roles do autocratic governance, global capitalism, religious institutions, socialist ideologies, and emerging technologies play in enabling or undermining academic autonomy?

Third, the conference will explore the epistemological underpinnings of academic freedom. Who has access to it, and can a global concept of academic freedom be articulated without defaulting to a Western, secular framework? How might we conceive of multiple humanisms—diverse epistemologies that maintain mutual intelligibility without being subsumed under a single tradition? Finally, in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, what are the potential benefits and risks of AI for academic freedom and the pluralism of humanistic inquiry?

Some possible topics of research include, but are not limited to

- Comparative conditions of academic freedom across global regions
- Political and economic forces shaping or constraining academic autonomy
- Ideological and religious influences on research and higher education
- Epistemological foundations and non-Western conceptions of academic freedom
- The idea of multiple humanisms and cross-cultural knowledge exchange
- The impact of artificial intelligence and digital technologies on academic inquiry
- Historical and philosophical perspectives on the evolution of academic freedom

Organizers

The conference is organized jointly by the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities (Cini Foundation), the Center for the Study of World Religions (Harvard Divinity School) the Department of Asian and North African Studies (Ca' Foscari University), and the KIFO Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research.

Abstracts and Texts

Abstracts up to 300 words, accompanied by a short CV, should be submitted in English by the 15th of January to civilta.comparate@cini.it. A notification of acceptance will be forwarded by the 31st of January.

Timetable

1. The call for papers is open – 7 November 2025.
2. Abstracts (300 words maximum) and CVs to be received by 15 January, 2026.
3. Notifications of acceptance will be given by 31 January, 2026.
4. The conference will be held 21-22-23 April 2026.

Practicalities and Funding

The organizers will provide accommodation on San Giorgio Island, coffee breaks and lunches for all participants. Participants will arrange and pay for their own transportation. Extra funding may be available to cover the travel expenses of a limited number of scholars who cannot obtain funding from their own institutions. If extra funding is needed, please indicate this in the email with which you submit your abstract. The Library of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilizations and Spiritualities will appreciate it if participants can bring and donate one book they authored or in which they have participated.

Contact

civilta.comparate@cini.it