The following text is an edited excerpt from my forthcoming book *Disenchanting India: Organized Rationalism and Criticism of Religion in India* (OUP, 2011).

Modes of Non-Religiosity

The work of the historian of religion Ulrich Berner inspired me to reflect on "modes of non-religiosity" (or "modes of unbelief") with respect to the Indian rationalist. In his paper, Berner outlines how certain kinds of skepticism—like that of Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE) or of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/1469-1536)—can go hand in hand with religious denominations, while representative figures of the same age—like Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Martin Luther (1483-1546)—can perceive skepticism as a threat to religion. On this basis Berner argues that the differences between such positions cannot be adequately described if one differentiates between religions, creeds, or kinds of religions. He convincingly shows how it is more fruitful to compare underlying individual "modes of religiosity" and illustrates this by discussing different positions taken toward violence in the name of religion. Berner notes:

> Until now, religious studies have been overly oriented to the religious language. They inherited the self-designations of religions as well as the very concept of "religion" as identification of their object of inquiry, although the inherent difficulties of this conceptualization were already raised in the 60s .... More important than the description of discrete religions would be the differentiation between and representation of different modes of religiosity, which can neither be correlated with different religions, nor with different kinds of religions–e.g. mono- and polytheism. With regard to the abovementioned examples one could differentiate between skeptic, fideistic, dogmatic and fundamentalist modes of religiosity. (Berner 2009: 52, translation by the author)

The anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse famously introduced the notion of different "modes of religiosity" to academic debates (2004). Yet, in my interpretation of Berner's application of this notion, and definitely with respect to my own use of the notions "modes of non-religiosity" and "modes of unbelief," this reference is somewhat misleading because it evokes the cognitive approach represented by Whitehouse and his colleagues. In his contribution to the book *Theorizing Religions Past* (edited by Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin) Berner already noted, with respect to Whitehouse's differentiation between "doctrinal" and "imagistic" modes of religiosity, that this notion "could be defined in a totally different way–for instance, fundamentalism, and skepticism could be described as different modes of religiosity" (2004: 157).

Berner considers it in many cases more fruitful to heuristically structure the "religious field" not along the lines of "theisms" (such as mono-, poly-, or atheism) or "religions" (such as Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism) but by distinguishing different modes of religiosity. These can of course vary within one religion, as Berner shows for Christianity. They further can serve as the basis for transhistorical comparisons, as Berner indicates by speaking of the related "skeptic religiosity" of the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (360–270 BC) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) (2009: 52). Moreover, the same mode of religiosity can of course also be found within different religions. I consider my book *Disenchanting India* (Quack 2011) to be the necessary condition for further work in this direction and the approach of Berner most heuristically fruitful in this respect. However, I extend Berner's approach from the focus on individuals to groups (as done by Berner 2004, but not with respect to his own differentiation of modes of religiosity 2009) from the focus on belief systems to more encompassing worldviews and "practices," as well as from the focus on "religiosity" to "non-religiosity" (a possibility already indicated by Berner in 2009: 54)

In other words, the approach of Berner challenges the theological attempt to find the unifying something within any given religion which is still prevalent in the social sciences. Anthropologists and scholars of religion tried and continue to try to capture the distinctive characteristics of religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and so on despite the fact that all attempts to find the *sui generis* of any religion proved to be highly contested, not only as a theological enterprise. The differentiation between different modes of religiosity as introduced by Berner runs transversely to the prevailing ways of ordering the religious field. It is an attempt to find alternative organizing principles independent of religious categories. The addition of modes of non-religiosity (or "unbelief") is an extension of this argument to the larger discursive field about religion(s) including also criticism, non-observance, and ignorance of religious concepts and practices.

The general attempt is not to oppose belief with unbelief or religion with atheism but rather to undercut these oppositions by preparing the grounds for ways to uncover similarities between modes of religiosity and non-religiosity as well as differences within different modes of non-religiosity or unbelief (or differences between modes of religiosity within one religious tradition, as done by Berner 2009).

By adding the word *mode* to my focus I wish to further underline that what is at stake is more than a mere set of cognitive or propositional statements. One central element of what I try

to describe in this book is a certain stance the rationalists take toward the world and their fellow human beings. In this context, I will also speak of their scientistic "worldview" following the German *Weltanschauung* understood as implying not only a certain interpretation of the world (*Weltdeutung*), but also the realm of practical applications as well the creation of general "meaning" in the lives of people. This will be set in relation to the rationalists' emphasis on the importance of rationality and progress and the assumption that the world is in principle explainable. Moreover, I will try to elicit aspects of their mode of unbelief which not only encompass their ideology, norms, and value systems but also certain mental attitudes, perceptions, and feelings, which include larger emotional stances, such as the discontent felt by the rationalists toward the general *māgāslepaṇā* (backwardness) of India. My focus on the worldview underlying their mode of unbelief includes further characteristic constructions of hierarchies and superiority, as becomes obvious through their behavior and the rhetoric used by the rationalists. In addition, I try to uncover what role their commitment and dedication to the rationalists' cause plays if set into relationship with the centrality of "doubt" in their ideological positions, as well as the confrontational attitude they display with respect to those people who do not share their convictions. Such elements of their mode of unbelief are neither without internal inconsistencies or contradictions, nor are they strictly closed, monolithic, and homogenous. Nevertheless, all the elements listed here and substantiated in the ethnography are shared to a relevant degree by the rationalists that I met.

Berner, U. (2004) "Modes of Religiosity and Types of Conversion in Medieval Europe and Modern Africa," in H. Whitehouse and L. H. Martin (eds.) *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History and Cognition.* Oxford: AltaMira, 157-172.

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Quack, J. (2011, *forthcoming*). *Disenchanting India: Organized Rationalism and Criticism of Religion in India.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Whitehouse, H. (2004) *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.