

Editorial

NATURALISM AND CHURCH LEADERS ON SCIENCE AND RELIGION

NATURALISM—*AS* RELIGION, *WITHIN* RELIGIONS, *WITHOUT* RELIGION

This year, the 66th Summer Conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) was held on Star Island, NH from June 27 to July 3, 2021. It is wonderful that this postponed in-person event could go ahead this time, while also live streaming many sessions.¹ Conference co-chair Willem B. Drees unfortunately could not come to the conference since U.S. travel restrictions for Europeans had not yet been lifted.² Despite this practical hurdle, the conference program that he had designed was successfully implemented and already now, in this issue, several of the presentations are appearing in print (thanks to Drees's efficient and effective guest-editing efforts).

The thematic section is introduced by Drees. He asks whether we know how to understand the terms “naturalism,” “religion,” and “religious naturalism.” His suggestion is that those engaged in the debate about naturalism and religion may be hunting two “snarks.” He explains that the conference title, “Naturalism—*as* Religion, *within* Religions, *without* Religion,” had been designed to ask about the way naturalism might function: as a replacement of religion, as an incentive for reform, or as a reason to reject religion. Ursula Goodenough and Jeremy Sherman investigate the emergence of self and purpose; they argue that each lifeform is a self, engaged in self-repair, self-protection, and self-reproduction, leading to the endowment of each self with systems of purpose, awareness, attunement, and meaning assessment, and they discuss the implications for our religious and ecological orientations. Matthew MacKenzie explores what he calls “liberal naturalism”; he focuses on the spiritual dimension of human flourishing and claims that, at the root of human experience, there are capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence, and that this spiritual dimension is a distinct and irreducible dimension of our flourishing. Curtis Craig considers the extent to which religious naturalism could replace traditional theism; through the analysis of survey data on awe and reverence toward the natural world, he finds an independent correlation between awe and reverence toward the natural world, on the one hand, and common moral values, such as compassion, on the other hand. Mark Hoelter assesses the link between recent neuroscience and cognitive

science and intense religious experience (Rudolf Otto's "mysterium tremendum"); he outlines significant implications for pro-social intra-group and intergroup work as well as for individual psychotherapeutic and spiritual growth and transformation. Charles Fowler observes that relationships and characteristics, in natural systems as well our minds, occur in patterns; he claims that by carefully choosing patterns that provide holistic guidance and then having our thinking follow such guidance is essential but ominously absent from today's world. Todd Macalister reviews what naturalists have been discussing and doing in terms of religious practices; he concludes that proposed practices are mainly a bottom-up collection, not a top-down following of naturalist traditions or leaders, and identifies an existing wish for greater structure and more guidance in what to do. Paul Carr highlights the limitations of "naturalism without religion"; he summarizes the ways that theologies have "completed" these limitations, focusing mainly on Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Tillich, Phil Hefner, and Ursula Goodenough. Jim Sharp examines the role of theistic evolution in three religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) by focusing on the work of three scholars, Jonathan Sacks, Keith Ward, and Nidhal Guessoum; they offer (differing) presentations of theistic evolution in a way that shows the potential a constructive science-and-religion discussion aimed at a popular audience. Alessandro Mantini gives an original spin to "religious naturalism"; according to him, new methodologies in scientific research and an associated epistemological change of paradigm makes it "natural" to escape from empiricism, mechanistic determinism, reductionism, and relativism, which he then illustrates for metaphysics and Christology *vis-à-vis* the study of the beginning and origin of the Universe. Drees concludes the set of articles with his own contribution, in which he questions whether naturalism really implies religious naturalism; he argues that in philosophical anthropology and in life, whether religious or nonreligious, dualistic and pluralist perspectives are appropriate, while one may remain agnostic on ultimate questions.

CHURCH LEADERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The next thematic section, on "UK Christian Church Leaders' Attitudes toward Science and Religion," contains two articles (by Lydia Reid and David Wilkinson, and by Thoko Kamwendo) from the U.K. collaborative project *Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science* (ECLAS).³ The ECLAS project's original research, as exemplified in this issue featuring results from in-depth interviews with senior leaders and educators in churches and para-church organizations, is monitoring attitudes toward science and the efficacy of existing scientific narratives. The intention for ECLAS research is to inform resources for teaching on science and religion, including theological and ordination courses. Reid and Wilkinson observe


that despite the relationship between science and religion being framed as one of “conflict” in the media, this was not the prevalent view among the church leaders and educators surveyed and interviewed. Kamwendo observes a strong resistance among the bishops she interviewed to a narrative of COVID-19 being divine punishment, which, she argues, is ultimately grounded in a desire to disable the blunt but effective tool of making moral judgments in the name of divine authority that regularly follow in the wake of global disasters.

OTHER ARTICLES

The Articles section contains five articles. In the first article, John Constantino and Thomas Baumel synthesize contemporary scientific and philosophical understanding of existential conflict and free will, in the context of psychiatry, to propose a reconciliation of faith and science of particular relevance to preservation of hope; they argue against “unnecessary dichotomization of the material and the Divine.” In the second article, Antoine Panaïoti re-examines Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, also in the context of psychiatry; he argues against the conventional view of the self as an illusion that the overwhelming majority of human beings suffer from a delusion concerning the nature of the self (and not from an illusion). In the third article, I Sil Yoon critically assesses the effects of transhuman technologies of artificial intelligence and intelligence amplification, especially the risk that they pose to widening existing socioeconomic disparity; she argues for deploying Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach to critique capitalism-driven technological development and consequent social inequality. In the fourth article, Léon Turner studies the link between synchronous rituals and social bonding in the context of evolutionary cognitive science of religion; he criticizes the focus of cognitive science of religion on individualistic and argues that a close examination of research into the social effects of synchronous activity reveals the need for a theoretically pluralistic explanation of how religion facilitates sociality. Finally, in the fifth article, which provides a bridge to the thematic section on naturalism, Peter Saulson confronts naturalism with the puzzle of the nature of time; following the thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel, he brings to the fore the dramatic difference between the realm of personal experience and the realm of material existence as described by physics, raising doubt about the unity of the concept of nature and thus about the attraction of naturalism. A brief “Comments and Response” section has been included following Saulson’s article, in which Robert John Russell and Michael Tooley offer different perspectives on physics and Saulson responds.

The issue ends with two book reviews. Patrick Brissey reviews John Martin Fischer’s *Death, Immortality, and Meaning in Life* and Mark

Coeckelbergh reviews Johannes Hoff's *Verteidigung des Heiligen: Anthropologie der digitalen Transformation*.

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NOTES

1. The Star Island Corporation has reported that there were no COVID-19 infections in this summer season, which is encouraging.
2. They were only lifted on November 8, 2021.
3. Funded currently by the Templeton Religion Trust, the ECLAS project is a collaboration of theologians, and physical and social scientists at the Universities of Durham and York in the United Kingdom, and in the policy team of the Church of England (though the project has an ecumenical reach). ECLAS's *modus operandi* is to develop a richer narrative around science as a divine gift and vocation to the church, rather than a threat to belief, and works outward from senior leadership (bishops and equivalent). Also, the materials for Tom McLeish's Boyle Lecture 2021 published in the previous issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (McLeish 2021) stemmed from the ECLAS project.

REFERENCE

- McLeish, Tom. 2021. "The Re-Discovery of Contemplation through Science." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 56 (3): 758–76.