

Announcements

IRAS
The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science

Purpose—IRAS is an independent society of scientists, philosophers, religion scholars, theologians, and others who want to understand the role of religion in our dynamic scientific world.

Activities—each year IRAS holds a week-long conference on Star Island, ten miles off the coast of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Topics are selected to be relevant to current scientific thinking and to fundamental religious questions. (IRAS members pay a reduced rate for conference registration.)

IRAS organizes events at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). IRAS has sponsored more than two hundred fifty meetings at universities, colleges, and theological schools.

Publications—*Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* and *IRAS Newsletter*. IRAS members receive subscriptions to these publications free of additional charge.

Special Relationships—Affiliated Society, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS); Member, Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (CSSR).

Membership Dues

\$70.00 Individual Member

\$80.00 Joint Member (two memberships but one set of publications)

\$40.00 Student Member (requires copy of student ID)

\$110.00 Institutional Member (supports IRAS's work: \$54.00 is tax deductible)

Invitation to Join—If you are in accord with the purposes of IRAS and would like to become a member, please submit an application to the IRAS Council, which reviews and votes on applications at biannual meetings in February and July. For an application write to:

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Institute on Religion in an Age of Science

Fifty-fourth Annual Star Island Conference
July 26–August 2, 2008

Emergence: Nature's Mode of Creativity—The Human Dimension

CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS: Terrence Deacon, U. California Berkeley
Philip Clayton, Claremont University
Ursula Goodenough, Washington University

In 2006 we explored the concept of emergence in its physical, geological, biological, and ecological contexts, enriching our sense of connection with the universe and other beings (iras.org/conference_2006.html). This year we will consider emergence in the context of the human, ranging across our cognitive, emotional, linguistic, cultural, artistic, and religious capacities.

Emergent properties arise out of relationships, like the neuronal signaling patterns that generate mental experience or the interpersonal connections that generate communal identity. They can be analyzed in terms of their interacting components, but the synergies that develop can generate higher-order unities with novel properties. Humans exemplify these emergent capacities in our modes of cognition, allowing us to generate phenomena that could not previously exist, such as music, morality, religion, and science.

The core thesis of the conference is that human mental evolution was not just “evolution as usual.” Rather, it was a case of “emergent evolution,” traversing a causal threshold as fundamental as the emergence of life, which in turn made biological evolution possible. Similarly, the emergence of symbolic communication made possible the subsequent co-evolution of brain, language, and culture, driving technology and generating new forms of consciousness in which vast webs of collective cognition and intersubjectivity are possible, many manifest in our religious traditions. These processes can be expected to lead to future transitions—not all human-friendly—that are every bit as revolutionary, demanding that we reflect on our understandings of the true, the good, the beautiful, and the sacred.

Speakers and workshop leaders from many disciplines will join conferees and clergy in considering the consequences of the thesis that human nature is fundamentally emergent. We will explore such questions as: In what ways are uniquely human mental abilities the result of emergent evolution, in contrast, for example, to the evolution of upright posture? How does the human conscious self differ from consciousness in other animals, and how does it arise? How does human language differ from other forms of communication, and what is its role in shaping our consciousness? In what ways might present and projected forms of electronic communication generate emergent changes in human identity and community? Where do our aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities come from? How does the emergence of our symbolic capacities help us understand empathy, meaning, and purpose? Is a cosmology of emergence consistent with existing moral, spiritual, metaphysical, and theological frameworks? How might it influence, or even transform, them?

There will be a professionally designed and led program for children and youth ages 3–17. Clergy and seminarians will meet regularly during the conference to shape conference materials for use in their ministries. CEUs upon request.

A list of confirmed speakers and more information on IRAS can be found at www.iras.org. Information on Star Island can be found at www.starisland.org. Information on conference fees, room and board, and registration is at www.iras.org/conference.html, or contact Bonnie Falla, IRAS registrar, 810 1/2 N. Ninth St. Allentown PA 18102; email bfalla@enter.net.