

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 organizes a week-long conference, which in 2009 will be held at the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. 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-fifth Annual Conference
The Chautauqua Institution
June 20–27, 2009

The Mythic Reality of the Autonomous Individual

CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS: **Ted Laurensen**, Lawyer, New York City
John Teske, Elizabethtown College

Concepts of individual autonomy and responsibility underlie much of the thought, institutions, and ways of living in modern societies. Yet they are shot through with complexity and contradiction and may be problematic for a flourishing human future.

This conference will address the religious, historical, social, and developmental genesis of human individuality and its consequences. Taking as given the physical emergence of our universe and the biological and social emergence of humanity explored in our last two conferences, we will delve into the historical development and current significance of the autonomous individual. We will examine (1) the psychological and social development of individuality, (2) its historical and cultural genesis and the contribution of religious beliefs and practices, (3) its centrality to the desirability and practice of democracy, (4) assumptions about the rational pursuit of individual goals in capitalist economic theory, (5) the need (or not) for separate institutional sources of power to oppose governmental subjugation, (6) the personal, cultural, and religious paradoxes inherent in the nurturance and practice of autonomy, (7) the biases and illusions that inhere in the pursuit of individual happiness, and (8) how the concept of self intersects with many religious doctrines, for example eternal life.

Speakers from anthropology, psychology, economics, religious history, theology, and political and legal theory will help us explore questions such as:

- How do modern Western concepts of the individual differ from historical concepts in Western thought and in other cultures?
- What model of individual autonomy makes sense in trying to understand ourselves as complex biosocial beings nurtured by and embedded in community, but having some degree of independence from it?
- Does understanding the fragility of individual autonomy undercut its existence or enhance its benefits?
- What are the dangers and advantages of individuality in the practice of our ethics, our democracy, and our spirituality?
- Does devotion to individual freedom produce a society so addicted to satisfying individual desires that it lacks the cohesion necessary to defend itself or deal with adverse ecological consequences?
- Is capitalism a necessary corollary of individual autonomy? of democracy? Is it true that centralized decision-making in human societies cannot work very well because of the kinds of animals we are?
- Does human rationality, and even science, depend upon particular forms of individuality?

There will be a professionally designed and led program for children and youth ages 3–17. There will be a refereed poster program for young scholars, and 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 the Chautauqua Institution can be found at www.ciweb.org. Information on conference fees, room and board and registration is at www.iras.org/Conference.html, or contact Joan Hunter, Registrar, 33 Village Street, Medway, MA 02053; email jbh_11@verizon.net.

THE PHILIP HEFNER FUND

In Appreciation for Twenty Years
of Outstanding Editorial Leadership

With gratitude for Philip Hefner's sustained and creative leadership of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* from June 1989 to June 2009, the Joint Publication Board of the journal has established The Philip Hefner Fund. This endowment fund will be used for the purpose of sustaining the journal and honoring the vision and service of Philip Hefner.

As a challenge to the *Zygon* community, \$70,000 has been pledged over five years to match dollar for dollar contributions to this fund. All who are interested in expressing their gratitude and in honoring Hefner's outstanding editorial leadership are invited to contribute to this fund. Donations may be in the form of one-time gifts or pledges of up to five years.

To contribute please copy, fill out, and send the form on the next page to

Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science
att. Philip Hefner Fund
1100 East 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615

or visit our Web site, www.zygonjournal.org, and download the form there.

—Karl E. Peters
Co-Editor for Development

THE PHILIP HEFNER FUND

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