

Zygon and the Future of Religion-and-Science

with Philip Hefner, "Discerning the Voice of Zygon"; Karl E. Peters, "Why Zygon? The Journal's Original Visions"; Solomon H. Katz, "Transcending Irony"; Lea F. Schweitz, "On the Road with Religion-and-Science"; Hava Tirosh-Samuels, "History and the Future of Science and Religion"; Stephen M. Modell, "The Genetic Recombination of Science and Religion"; John A. Teske, "A Literary Trinity"; Carol Rausch Albright, "James B. Ashbrook and His Holistic World"; James W. Haag, "Blazing a New Trail"; Joan D. Koss-Chiomo, "Concerning Diversity and Practicality"; Ann Pederson, "New Directions, New Collaborations"; Gregory R. Peterson, "Stage-Two Secularity"; Willem B. Drees, "Reflecting upon Religion"

TRANSCENDING IRONY

by Solomon H. Katz

Abstract. A more complete understanding of the biocultural evolutionary origins of the concept of *ought* as developed by David Hume and G. E. Moore may lower the philosophical barrier between *is* and *ought* and provide new insights about the separations between the domains of religion and science. If this conjecture is correct, the resulting wisdom will help transcend a major source of irony that Philip Hefner has so aptly identified in his essay.

Keywords: biocultural evolution; ethics; *is*; naturalistic fallacy; *ought*

My first encounter with Philip Hefner was in 1972 on a beautiful fall day in upstate Rensselaerville, New York, in the foothills of the Adirondacks, at a group conference of about ten, including Ralph Burhoe, Sir John Eccles, Charles Birch, Theodosius Dobzhansky, Arthur Peacocke, George Riggan, and Irvin Laszlo, among others. The focus of the meeting was on human purpose (see "Human Purpose" 1973), and we all had been invited by a

Solomon H. Katz is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Krogman Growth Center. His mailing address is 762 E. Passyunk Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19147; e-mail skatz2001@aol.com.

[*Zygon*, vol. 45, no. 2 (June 2010)]

© 2010 by the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*. ISSN 0591-2385

www.zygonjournal.org

relatively new journal called *Zygon* and the Center for Advanced Studies on Religion in an Age of Science (CASIRAS), which was based in Chicago.¹

Hefner began his presentation by saying he accepted that the theory of physical evolution of humankind offered by Arthur Peacocke is

no static phenomenon, but rather a welter of possibilities which point toward the future. These possibilities are open to further developments, some of which may be so dramatic that they constitute “emergences” into new dimensions of life that seem, from our perspective, to be breaks in the evolutionary continuum. But at the same time, these potentialities are all fully grounded in the physical, psychosocial, and cultural evolution of what has gone before, so that they are in a sense determined by the thrust of that past development and also a fulfillment of it. . . . Very simply, it is my thesis that the nature and purpose of man is to participate fully in the further development of the evolutionary process in which he has emerged. Inasmuch as he is a self-conscious creature whose reflection upon his situation inevitably leads to actions within that situation, for him to participate in the process implies at the same time to advance the process. This condition of man places upon him the twofold pressure to act as to be faithful to his potentialities and at the same time to apply the full powers of his reflective abilities to discerning what action best discharges that faithfulness. Man’s purpose is continually to define himself and to actualize that definition in action, to be and to actualize self-consciously the process of evolution in which he already shares by virtue of the unselfconscious thrust of evolution that has brought life into being and placed man at its pinnacle. All of the scientific perspectives tell us that man is by nature himself a process. Our judgment is that if man has been made thus and has arrived at this condition as a certain phase of the process, he should enjoy it and participate in it for all he is worth and responsibly advance the process according to the insights of the self-consciousness which has evolved in him. I find that this purpose of man is illuminated by the heuristic category of self-definition. . . . There are a number of important assumptions that underlie my use of this category, however, and these deserve to be put in perspective. (Hefner 1973, 395–411)

Phil went on to complete a remarkable presentation that not only contained the seeds of his important future work on the “created co-creator” but also assured me that there was another theologian, besides Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (see Teilhard 1956), who had a deeply considered understanding of the meaning of evolution as a serious source of dialogue with religion. In so doing, Phil left his mark on me forever.

Both of us that day attended our first conference on religion and science, and both of us published our first papers in *Zygon* the following year—and we have been deeply connected ever since. Phil has continued to impress me with the depth and breadth of his knowledge and his continuous willingness to take on and grow with the various challenges of life. The fascinating evolutionary perspective he started with more than 37 years ago formed the roots of much of his career and extends all the way into what he has presented to us today, while also adding to the long list of rich and important insights he has shared with us over the years.

Hefner’s essay in this section challenges us with an attractive vision of four perspectives of religion-and-science. Although I agree with his delin-

eration of the first three communities and appreciate with a smile his interpretation of irony, I would like to add another important dimension to his idea of irony.

Phil's notion of evolution in his first *Zygon* paper was "no static phenomenon." I want to emphasize that the irony of our current enterprise is not static, either. In fact, I suggest that it is very dynamic. Moreover, I see new signs of hope that we can move beyond the irony inherent in the traditional consideration of science and religion as parallel universes, as implied by the "nonoverlapping magisteria" concept promoted by our colleague Stephen J. Gould (1997, 16–22). We may even move beyond the irony inherent in the much more relevant concept of yoking, as Hefner and Burhoe often have used to characterize the bridges various scientists and theologians have created (see Breed 1992). Hence my goal in this brief response is to lift the lid on Phil's irony and peek at its current dynamics by providing a few insights on how the irony that he has described may be transcended in the not-so-distant future.

To begin with, Phil is correct in focusing on the *is/ought* question. However, I would like to add a dimension to the discussion that will help us understand how we can begin to introduce a more dynamic view of the irony he perceives. First, I know that it is self-evident, but the science-and-religion perspective that engages us so deeply today came out of the ashes of World War II where both science and religion failed humanity. Science did nothing to deal with the consequences of having created the most awful weapon in human history, and religions did nothing to prevent the massive murder of human life. Both let humanity down but for different reasons. This is at the crux of the *is/ought* question.

Science, which represents the conscious perfection of techniques to seek truth about how our world works, from universes to subatomic particles, is an incredible engine of discovering what *is*. However, David Hume's eighteenth-century idea of the naturalistic fallacy ([1739] 2000, Book III, part I, section I) and G. E. Moore's early-twentieth-century work further perfecting it ([1903] 2004, 1–256) virtually assured throughout the twentieth century that science could never institutionally bridge into the realm of *ought* from knowing what *is*. Therefore, science as enterprise never could provide oughts based upon the *ises* that were discovered. I suggest that this has helped limit the corporate or institutional responsibility of science and placed a heavy burden of individual responsibility on scientists to decide on the moral issues, or oughts, of the day.

Religions, however, have both *is* and *ought* but often are limited by outmoded explanations of what *is* that led to the *ought* statements that traditionally have flowed from the religious communities. These oughts have been questioned, especially when science has challenged the traditional religious interpretation of what *is*. This has led in contemporary times to a rational approach to generating oughts through ethical analysis

and has shifted the balance toward ethics, rather than religion, as being the important bridge with science.

Although some of this shift toward the secular generation of ethics cannot be avoided, the fact is that hostility between religion and science has contributed to the shift in the arrows (see Figure 1) away from the traditional role that religion has played in the development of ethical precepts. This shift, indicated by the different sizes of the arrows, has tended to isolate and potentially marginalize the religious and spiritual communities in ways that are counterproductive for the solution of this problem and may be one of the causes of a rise in fundamentalist religions.

This idea is summarized in Figure 1, a heuristic model that emphasizes the three-way relations between science, ethics, and religious domains. Science on the left and religion on the right are linked by a relatively thin arrow; ethics on the bottom is linked by a very thick arrow representing the reliance placed on ethics for the oughts and is linked by a thin arrow to religion. In one sense the clever yoking that *Zygon* attempts to achieve in reformulating religion is to search for ways to make the bridge more real and broaden the balance of the arrows that connect these critical domains.

There are several hopeful signs that this balance is shifting in helpful directions. First, new organizations are proliferating at a global level, in-

The Contemporary Relationships among Religion, Science and Ethics: How Can We Balance these Arrows of Influence?

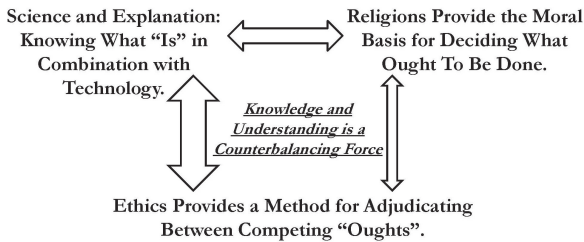


Fig. 1. This flow chart represents the relations between the three domains referred to in this article. In contemporary times there is a balance between the scientific means of knowing what is and the religiously based understanding of what ought to be. However, the balance between these two domains is being largely bypassed by the secular need to adjudicate ethical decisions in response to factors such as the very rapid changes being brought about by the growth of technology, the enormous increase in human population size, and the unpredictability of environmental degradation being produced by factors such as rapid climate change. The net effect of this is a balance favoring secular means of developing ethics and a shift away from the traditional religiously based morality generated ethics.

cluding the Zygon Center and hundreds of others such as the Metanexus Institute,² academic ones such as the International Society on Science and Religion (ISSR),³ and even those involving interreligious dialogue such as the Parliament of the World's Religions.⁴ These all share a common value that the bridge between science and religion writ large can be best traversed with a deep spirit of respect and humility on both sides.

Second, significant transdisciplinary advances are being made in understanding the genetic, neural, and biological basis of many of the human emotions and cognitive capacities that underlie such human capacities as cooperation, altruism, compassion, love, and spiritual transformation.⁵ These advances are having a direct effect on confirming, clarifying, and otherwise affirming the evolved wisdom inherent in the religious and spiritual domains.

Third, there is a rapid development of newly operationalized theories of evolution that effectively integrate biological and cultural evolutionary processes with specific problems such as those relating to food, water, and climate change. These involve active participation of the religious and spiritual communities with the scientific communities and are providing new insights about how societies test, develop, evolve, and generate the oughts that guide our lives.

I am suggesting that we have traveled some distance from where we started. We are further than engaging new public audiences, religious communities, and even developing an academic discipline. We are at the edge of a new era when the gaps will be filled not with irony but with a new empiricism in which the scientific community and the religious and theological communities could be contributing. Where previously we had incomplete descriptions that were more ironic than anything else, we will have a new level of knowledge that gives voice to both the lens of science and the wisdom of the religious communities, which have observations and characterizations of human nature that are as insightful in their own way as the most important discoveries made by science.

I see the potential of irony's being transcended and ultimately replaced by a much more balanced approach where the thin arrows are replaced by thicker arrows, indicating greater understanding and cross-fertilization. Although technically we cannot bridge Hume's naturalistic fallacy principle, we are approaching the point when we will be able to inform the world how new ought statements can be generated with greater efficiency than the slower, bicultural evolutionary process that has to date characterized the development of oughts and the morals that flow from them (Katz 1981, 124–45). I see a new field in which the science and religious communities partner to explore the spiritual nature of humanity, creating a new level of harmony and exchange, with the knowledge of science and the wisdom of religious insight about the nature of humanity receiving

equal respect (Katz 1999, 237–54). It is a give-and-take process and requires and inspires new levels of respect between the communities.

If this potential to transcend irony continues to develop, new levels of insight will flow and fulfill the synthetic promise that this journal, *Zygon*, has been moving toward under Hefner's guidance for the last twenty years, and for all of the years of leadership by Karl Peters and the late Burhoe before him. This will be the challenge that the journal will encounter and grow with in the future.

Hefner and his team of colleagues have earned the respect and admiration of an entire field for having done so much for so many over his journey with *Zygon*. I wish the next generation much continued growth and success under the new leadership of Willem Drees and the continued remarkable efforts of Peters. I wish all of you the best. This is a journey upon which we must continue in order to keep *Zygon* and the values it represents flourishing in the future.

NOTES

A version of this article was read at the symposium "Where Are We Going? *Zygon* and the Future of Religion-and-Science," 8–9 May 2009, in Chicago.

1. Ralph W. Burhoe founded CASIRAS, which was housed at the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago in 1970.
2. <http://www.metanexus.net/?gclid=CKq46LfE650CFdx05QodDXCLLg>.
3. <http://www.issr.org.uk/index.asp>.
4. www.parliamentofreligions.org.
5. <http://www.metanexus.net/magazine/tabid/68/id/10608/Default.aspx>.

REFERENCES

- Breed, David R. 1992. *Yoking Science and Religion: The Life and Thought of Ralph Wendell Burhoe*. Chicago: Zygon Books.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 1997. "Nonoverlapping Magisteria." *Natural History* 106 (March): 16–22.
- Hefner, Philip. 1973. "The Self-definition of Life and Human Purpose: Reflections upon Divine Spirit and the Human Spirit." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 8:395–411.
- "Human Purpose." 1973. Special issue. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 8, nos. 3–4 (September–December).
- Hume, David. [1739] 2000. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press USA.
- Katz, Solomon H. 1981. "Evolutionary Considerations of the Is/Ought Relationship." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 12:124–45.
- . 1999. "Toward a New Concept of Global Morality." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 34:237–54.
- Moore, G. E. [1903] 2004. *Principia Ethica*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover.
- Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. 1956. *Man's Place in Nature*. New York: Harper and Row.