

# *Voices from the Next Generation*

with Michael Hogue and Lea F. Schweitz, “Exploring Humanity and Our Relations”; Paul Voelker, “Materialist Spirituality?”; Andrea Hollingsworth, “The Ambiguity of Interdisciplinarity”; Jason P. Roberts, “Emerging in the Image of God to Know Good and Evil”; Stephen Edward McMillin, “Faith-Based Social Services: From Communitarian to Individualistic Values”; and Steven Cottam, “Self-Control Failure in Catholicism, Islam, and Cognitive Psychology”

## EXPLORING HUMANITY AND OUR RELATIONS

by Michael Hogue and Lea F. Schweitz

*Abstract.* This brief article introduces a symposium series on science and spirituality. Articles by Paul Voelker, Andrea Hollingsworth, Jason P. Roberts, Stephen McMillin, and Steven Cottam represent the prize-winning papers from the first two symposia.

*Keywords:* hermeneutics; human nature; metaphysics; theological anthropology

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The articles in this special section represent the prize-winning papers from the first two graduate student symposia on science and spirituality hosted by the Zygon Center for Religion and Science. Held at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in May 2009 and April 2010, these graduate student symposia represent the yoking of the Zygon Center’s mission of research, teaching, and outreach with the importance of developing student scholarship.

Since 1966, a group has gathered in Hyde Park, a neighborhood on Chicago’s south side, for the Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science. The seminar has brought together graduate students, theologians, scientists, philosophers, ethicists, church leaders, and wide variety of professionals for an interdisciplinary adventure into a topic of pressing concern in religion and science. Currently, the Advanced Seminar is hosted by the Zygon Center, and this year, we have been exploring humanity in the light of recent developments in biotechnologies and our understanding

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of human prehistory. One thing is clear, we are and will continue to be in need of scholars who are willing to take up these emerging fields, ask the big questions, formulate the new questions, and collaborate.

Growing out of a successful student society and partially supported by a Metanexus Global Network Initiative Continuation Program Grant from the Metanexus Institute, the graduate student symposium on science and spirituality has gathered a nationwide community of graduate students, faculty mentors, and religious leaders for a day-long event. Participants have come together around a common interest in the big questions of religion and science and a shared commitment to the professional development of the next generation of scholars.

The result has been a dynamic exploration of some of humanity's deepest questions. These "Next Generation" scholars are taking a fresh look at the human condition and the interdisciplinary enterprise that such scholarship requires.

In 2009, our call for proposals asked, "How do we know God or the Sacred? And, what is the nature of the relationship between God or the Sacred and the world?" Paul Voelker and Andrea Hollingsworth both developed constructive responses. While the former's is metaphysical and the latter's is hermeneutical; both are attentive to the methodological implications of the research.

Paul Voelker (doctoral candidate, Loyola University, Chicago) presents a two-pronged critical materialist intervention into the religion and science dialogue. He argues that much of the religion and science dialogue has assumed that a materialist reduction of religious phenomena is antireligious and morally problematic. Voelker argues squarely against this assumption for a more materialist approach to religion and science studies (an approach that he sometimes refers to as "naturalistic"). He advocates in particular for building upon the religion and science scholarship of theorists such as Scott Atran and Pascal Boyer, who themselves build upon the neurosciences. His argument is moral as well as methodological. He speculates that one of the primary sources of some religion and science scholars' prejudices against materialism is a concern with moral relativism. Voelker contends, however, that a pernicious metaphysical dualism that underlies the antimaterialist prejudice in religion and science studies is actually more troubling morally. In his view, a metaphysically dualistic foundation for morality provides no empirical or objective basis for the adjudication of different moral commitments and thus is itself deeply relativistic. Metaphysical dualism in effect insulates moral debate from appeal to empirical criteria. Against these moral implications of dualism, Voelker advocates for a more empirical, ethically naturalistic approach to the question of human flourishing, such as that developed by Owen Flanagan. Voelker concludes his article by suggesting that his defense of materialism potentially clears the way for a

more genuinely dialogical, multidisciplinary future for religion and science studies.

In her article, Andrea Hollingsworth (doctoral candidate, Loyola University, Chicago) pursues the form of consciousness that she takes to be central to the nature of multidisciplinary work in twenty-first century religion and science studies. Drawing from the scholarship of theologian David Tracy and psychologist and philosopher of religion James W. Jones, she advocates for a complex multidisciplinary consciousness enacted through mutually informative moments of “negation” and “ecstasy.” She describes “negation” as the existential effect of the decentering of one’s own native disciplinary framework through engagement with the questions, methods, and assumptions of an alternate discipline. The “negation” in question is not only of the scholar’s disciplinary perspective, but also the attending experience of subjectivity. “Negation” thus describes methodological and existential dispossession and helps to explain the risk entailed in multidisciplinary scholarship. Hollingsworth interprets “ecstasy” as the enriched reinhabitation of one’s home disciplinary perspective and its attendant notion of subjectivity through cross-disciplinary encounter. This methodologically and existentially enriched reinhabitation of one’s home discipline, and the new lines of inquiry it generates, provides the countervailing promise of risky multidisciplinary endeavors. As Hollingsworth writes, the “losing and finding of the self through experiences of [cross-disciplinary] alterity holds potential to inform a descriptive account of the twenty-first century scholar’s transformations of beliefs and self-understandings that come about whilst engaged in authentic dialogue with disciplinary others.”

In 2010, we asked, “What makes us human? Is there such a thing as human nature? How do our ideas of human nature relate to God, the Sacred, and/or the world?” Jason Roberts, Steven Cottam, and Stephen McMillin offer substantive responses and draw on a wide range of interlocutors to open up these big questions even further.

Jason P. Roberts (doctoral candidate, Marquette University, Milwaukee) draws in his article from the latest work in the biological sciences and in biblical hermeneutics to present a critically integrative theological anthropology. Inspired by the examples of theologian Philip Hefner and philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Roberts aims to revivify biblical symbols of the human through an interdisciplinary interpretation of the Christian *imago dei* tradition. With the aim of articulating what Paul Ricoeur called an experience of “second naïveté,” he develops insights from biocultural evolutionary thinking and emergentism to articulate a fundamentally relational anthropology that leads to enriched interpretations of the anthropological symbols in Genesis. Through critical discussions of “fall,” “original sin,” and “knowledge of good and evil,” Roberts offers an illuminative account of the human as what he aptly describes as a

“conscipent kludge of finiteness and freedom” and also as made in the image of God. In light of this, Roberts writes that we humans “have not fallen from a state of original bliss so much as we as individuals and a species have stumbled upon the original ambivalence of our created nature—its qualitatively and quantitatively unique capacities for cooperation *and* conflict, for good *and* evil.”

Stephen McMillin (doctoral candidate, University of Chicago, Chicago) offers an insightful analysis of the ways in which a liberal free market individualistic anthropology has come to dominate previously communitarian relational anthropologies in social services, even those run through churches otherwise critical of dominant cultural images of the human being and the common good. His analysis is couched within a helpful historical overview of four paradigm shifts in the social services. The first paradigm shift, according to McMillin, occurs in the early twentieth century Progressive Era when previous emphases on philanthropic charity merged with the rise of the welfare state and gave birth to modern American social services. The second shift occurs during the time of the Great Society, when faith-based services were legitimated as complementary to state-based social services. The third major shift occurs during the time of Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America” to usher in an age of decentralization and the resulting disparities of social service funding and efficacy. The fourth and current paradigm, emerging out of late 1990s welfare reform, emphasizes individual rights and the privatization of social services. McMillin demonstrates the ways in which these paradigm shifts have been significantly influenced by anthropological shifts rooted in the changing theologies and cultural politics of American Christianity. His conclusion is that faith-based services in the present appear further to reinforce rather than to offer critical alternatives to the dominant free market ideology and individualistic rights discourse that define contemporary social services in the United States.

Steven Cottam (doctoral candidate, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago) writes in his article that colloquially, being human has come to be defined by human failings: “to err is human,” as Alexander Pope puts it. And yet, Cottam suggests, there is one kind of failure over which humans have significant control, the failure of the “ought” self. Cottam pursues the question of the degree to which humans are capable of genuinely exhibiting self-control and thus of resisting failure of will through two routes. He first compares and correlates insights from the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin with dual process theories of cognition. In so doing, he articulates the problem of weak will as a problem of moral disintegration. On these views, the moral self is literally a divided self. The second route he takes into his argument is through a comparison of Qur’anic accounts of human finitude and psychological Construal Level Theory. In contrast to Catholic views of original sin, Cottam suggests the primary human moral fallibility in Islam turns on failures of memory and

perception, which fund disobedience to Allah. Concern with memory and perception is also central to psychological Construal Level Theory, a theory of moral psychology that interprets moral behavior through varying types of goal perception. Cottam concludes by suggesting that while the two interdisciplinary routes into the common human moral problem of the weak will do not exhaustively explain this perennial human challenge, they do mutually inform one another in ways that would not be possible if it were not for ongoing research in the field of religion and science studies.

Each of the articles included here reveals the collegiality of the conversation in the research and between the participants, but it deserves special mention. Theological education and interdisciplinary scholarship often occur at the fragile margins of institutions, and the economic climate is one in which jobs are scarce and financial costs are high. From this context, the generous spirit of the participants cannot be taken for granted, and it brings into sharper focus the creative vitality of the next generation.

Each symposium has operated on the principle that these scholars are more than apprentices or simply a bridge between the past and the future. These scholars have genuine contributions—sometimes interventions—to make, and we are delighted to be able to share some of the fruits of these events with the readers of *Zygon*.

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