

Editorial

CLOUDY TERRITORIES?

The Cloud of Unknowing is a late medieval English mystical text; it has inspired Catherine Keller's title *Cloud of the Impossible*. A cloud seems fairly diffuse; territory sounds more solid: *terra*-Earth. However, *The Territories of Science and Religion* is unsettling for those who assume to be on firm ground when reflecting on religion and on science. And if one considers the articles in this issue, we are in cloudy territory: What have atoms, demons, and E-meters to do with each other? In this issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, we continue half a century of studies and discussions, all in one way or another engaging science and technology, religions and worldviews, and contemporary societies and individuals.

THE TERRITORIES OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION: A DISCUSSION OF PETER HARRISON'S SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

The Territories of Science and Religion, Peter Harrison's Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in 2011, considers a problem that might be considered preliminary to any discourse on the way religion and science interact. The preliminary question is: *How do we define and distinguish those two human endeavors, "religion" and "science"?* Peter Harrison is a historian of the humanities, director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Queensland, Australia. He served as the Andreas Idreos Professor of Religion and Science at Oxford University, as a successor of John Hedley Brooke. In that capacity, he has now been succeeded by Alister McGrath.

There are two clusters of human concerns, those that have "to do with the nature of the physical universe and its operations, and those that concern the goals of human existence and the source of our moral values" (Harrison 2015, ix). That we distinguish just two, draw their boundaries in a particular way, and use particular frames to understand their identities, is, however, ours. Harrison makes his point clear with the analogy of maps. Even though a particular physical territory might have existed ages ago, current boundaries may be fairly recent. Speaking about the relationship between Germany and France in the time of Charlemagne, if I am allowed to make up a European example, would be anachronistic and nonsensical. So too for issues now addressed as "the relationship between science and religion." There were practices that have over time morphed into what we

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now call science and religion, but the modern terms do not describe units that existed in the same configuration in earlier epochs.

Harrison develops this in a chapter that considers transformations in the quest to understand the cosmos, which in the past did not assume today's naturalism. He considers shifting understandings of relations we would now consider causal, but which were full of symbolic meaning. To simplify the issue with another example of my own: If someone were to say that in the Middle Ages people believed in miracles, and if one understands miracles as violations of natural laws, one ascribes as background belief a notion of lawfulness that did not yet exist. The world was endowed with theological and moral meanings.

Harrison then turns to the concept of religion, a subject of an earlier book by him, *“Religion” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (1990). Over the centuries, we see a terminological shift from “being religious” as meaning “being virtuous” to “having certain beliefs.” This shift made it possible to speak about “the Christian religion” as an object rather than of “Christian religion” as a way of life. A further development is the understanding of a multiplicity of religions. With such gradual changes in the understanding of religion and of religions, the nature of arguments changed as well. In my opinion, changes in the concept of religion are a most important issue in our time, as with secularization the nature of what it means to be religious (or spiritual—another flexible term) changed, and not just the number of adherents of the churches. So too for science, as a turn toward utility and progress and the professionalization of the nineteenth century changed its character as well.

In the Epilogue, Harrison emphasizes that he does not seek to argue that the issues disappear once one is aware of the historical context. He does not intend to make a grandiose claim that all philosophical problems may be solved by showing how they arise due to linguistic confusion, but awareness of the context clarifies discussions and may help to counter naive generalizations. Such a perspective undermines simple classificatory schemes and arguments about conflict, separation, or compatibility, because the underlying question again and again, is: What do you mean by religion? A question this historian shares with contemporary sociologists and other scholars of religion. The recapitulation of the book in the previous paragraphs draws upon a published review (Drees 2015).

In this issue, four scholars offer their comments on the book, followed by a response by Peter Harrison. Peter Kjærgaard, director of the Natural History Museum of Denmark, appreciates the historical analysis, but seeks to draw Harrison out of the safe comfort of the historian's role. History matters. The metaphor of “territories” might make it seem too easy, as the saying “good fences make good neighbors” suggests. Religious practices are themselves also subject of scientific research. Kaspar von Greyerz focuses on the understanding of scholars from the Reformation era. He challenges

to some extent the emphasis on Protestant inclinations toward literalism in biblical interpretation (rather than allegorical interpretations) and “disenchantment” as a leading motive. Nathan Ristuccia considers the parallel of Harrison’s approach and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s treatment of philosophy as therapy, dissolving problems by resolving confusion. Michael Fuller charts the territory ahead: What to do in “religion and science” when our basic categories are considered contextually? If we accept Harrison’s thesis, not only is it an anachronism to speak about science and religion as being in conflict—many other orientations in “religion and science” are also at stake. In his response, Harrison reflects on all these comments and challenges. The Wittgensteinian perspective is accepted, but also relativized. The consequences for the future, Fuller’s theme, are considered earnestly. Thus, this discussion is not only of importance to readers with an interest in the history of religion and science, but should be considered by all of us in the present, including those with a constructive or systematic agenda.

CATHERINE KELLER’S *CLOUD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE*

Theologian Catherine Keller is a professor of constructive theology at Drew University. For some readers, she might be known for an earlier book, *On the Mystery* (Keller 2008), which drew on Whiteheadian process thought. If we think in terms of a process, we will never reach the final destination—we are on the way; “on the mystery”. Her recent book *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (2015) draws for its title inspiration from a medieval treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the subsequent development of ideas on knowledge and its limitations by Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), who is known as the author of a work on learned ignorance, *De docta ignorantia*. In her recent book, Keller draws on relationality, also drawing on the philosophy of quantum physics. If relations are central, closure seems impossible—“the mystery” of the earlier work is not resolved but reflected upon. Her book offers an inspiring and creative reflection on knowledge and existence, and the more specific agenda on reality and relationality.

In this issue, four scholars reflect on this complex work. Kirk Wegter-McNelly, himself the author a book on quantum entanglement and theology (Wegter-McNelly 2011), focuses on the nature of knowledge, and in particular the character of hypothetical knowledge. Could scientific and religious knowledge both be treated as hypotheses? In what sense do these function differently? Carol Wayne White, author of *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (2016), shares with Keller an emphasis on the relationality and materiality of our existence. Her “naturalism” is not a position that claims to know what nature is like, but one that has a similar sensibility to that which is unknown, which could be—a “could” that resonates with the “cloud” of Keller. Donovan

Schaefer presents a moral and existential engagement that has much in common with Keller's, but argues that moral relationality can be considered independent of the discourse on quantum physics. Emmanuel Levinas is a relevant inspiration, and rather than quantum physics, evolution is the most relevant natural science to understand our relations. Colleen Carpenter also focuses on relationality. She discusses problematical relations. Abusive relationships, violence in relationships: such realities should make us reconsider metaphysical and moral praise for relationality. In her contribution, Keller articulates some of the main themes of her own work and responds to the insights and challenges raised.

NUCLEAR WASTE, CONSPIRACIES, AND E-METERS: REMARKABLE RELIGION AND TECHNOLOGY

Without the self-reflective critical sensibilities of Harrison, Keller, and many others, one might perhaps dismiss many examples of technology in religious contexts and of religion in the context of modern technological societies as pseudoscience and pseudoreligion. However, even practices and beliefs that are not in line with consolidated science and critical modern thinking are worthy of study. This section will consider three such examples—a proposal to establish a religious taboo to protect nuclear waste, Christian demonology and conspiracy theories, and the E-meter in Scientology.

In the twentieth century, physics gave us access to nuclear power, both military and peaceful. With nuclear power came nuclear waste and a responsibility to safeguard it that extends to generations far beyond our horizon. How can we make certain that future generations will not disturb the sites, and thereby damage themselves and their (and our distant) offspring? They might not understand our language or our mathematical symbols. Could religions help? Should we invent a new religious myth to convey warnings across centuries? Sebastian Musch informs us about a remarkable proposal along these lines, entertained in the 1980s. As the author acknowledges, any assumption that religions could provide stable taboos over tens of thousands of years seems naïve, given the dynamics of all living religions.

Readers of *Zygon* will be aware of resistance among some in American Christianity to evolution and to anthropogenic climate change. S. Jonathon O'Donnell helps us understand this in a broader context by studying the demonology of Thomas R. Horn and others in this milieu, which not only engages biblical texts, but also transhumanism, ufology, New Age beliefs, conspiracy beliefs, and secular ideas of technological progress. Those interested in secular myths of progress might return to a review of a book by Sven Wagner, *The Scientist as God* (2012), on literary representations of scientists playing God, from *Frankenstein* to *My Fair Lady* (Brooke 2013).

The electropsychometer or E-meter is used in sessions in Scientology. Stefano Bigliardi discusses the significance of this galvanometer within the Scientology movement, as an example of the function and symbolic meaning of technology in new religious movements.

FURTHER ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Greg Cootsona considers attitudes and ideas of emerging adults (18–30 years). At least in Western contexts, they seem to be more pluralist qua religious orientation, “spiritual bricoleurs.” Hence, traditional places for the “religion and science” discussions such as seminaries, Christian colleges, and congregations might become less significant. Perceptions shaped by media representations are important, and those tend to refer more often to Richard Dawkins than to Francis Collins, and thereby promote an image of conflict rather than coexistence.

Great traditions continue to be significant as well. Christopher Knight argues that an Eastern Orthodox Christian theology offers a different perspective on “the science and religion dialogue.” Rather than look for the causal joint to understand divine action and thus again and again wrestle with the successful naturalism of science that seems to close “gaps for God,” the naturalistic perspective could be accepted and appreciated in an encompassing teleological-christological understanding of the cosmos.

Addressing an issue of practical concern, a contribution by Omar Qureshi and Aasim Padela deals with the question of when one should go see a doctor—a question that offers a window on the coexistence of secular professional approaches such as provided in health care and religious attitudes that seem to justify a fatalistic approach, as one should leave it to God. What sources of reasoning do Muslim medical doctors and jurists of various schools draw upon? When is knowledge sufficiently certain to count as knowledge?

Two books, one on Galileo and one on Maimonides, are reviewed in this issue. One might say that the Galileo affair was a struggle over the boundaries of the territories of religion and science, the topic of Harrison’s book. And the intellectual theological restraint of Jewish doctor and philosopher Maimonides preceded the mystical, agnostic line of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and of Nicholas of Cusa by a few centuries. However, the book reviewed is one relevant to the history of medicine, of interest alongside the contribution by Qureshi and Padela, reminding us of a history shared by multiple traditions.

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