

## *Editorial*

### EXISTENTIALIST LITERATURE, COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF RELIGION, AND THE SCIENTIFICATION OF RELIGION

Reflections on religion and science can be found at various places. *Literature* is one such place. In this issue, we will learn about the medical doctor and Catholic existential novelist Walker Percy, born in 1916, a century ago. Not widely known, it seems to me, but he is a remarkable voice, well represented in a section of this issue edited and introduced by Leslie Marsh. Abstraction and alienation seem to be key words, with authenticity as a contrast. Elizabeth Corey treats his understanding of the human condition with the image of an individual journey or pilgrimage. Stacey E. Ake goes in greater detail into his understanding of science, which can analyze our environment (*Umwelt*), but not the symbolic universe of humans (*Welt*). John D. Sykes, Jr., further develops the symbolic understanding of language, and the reflection on animal studies, from which Percy collected essays in *The Message in the Bottle* (1975). Benjamin B. Alexander focuses on the understanding and critique of science, or rather its social and cultural impact, for instance in the novel *The Moviegoer*. Alexander traces some of the influence of Percy on Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

Whereas for Walker Percy the limitations of science were philosophically important, others expect that science will be able to study everything, including religion. One such area is the *cognitive science of religion*. Daniel Lim considers arguments about the question whether cognitive science of religion (CSR) poses a threat to “folk theism.” Some defensive moves are considered insufficient. However, he does see a viable response to the “debunking argument,” in the context of a nonreductive physicalist understanding of reality. Hans van Eyghen too considers “explaining away” arguments, distinguishing two types, those that argue that religious beliefs are incompatible with scientific understandings, and a second one that argues that the scientific understanding makes the religious view superfluous. The second type of argument is discussed at greater length.

A quite different approach to religion focuses less on cognitive mechanisms and more on the language used by believers in their historical context. A recent study by Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000*, considers the impact of science on religious beliefs and practices, including alchemy, vitalism, paganism, and other science-like varieties of religious and philosophical thought. In this issue, we have one extensive review of this book,

by Leonardo Ambasciano, with a response by the author, Kocku von Stuckrad.

The first article in this issue is on the early evolution of *human morality*, by anthropologist Margaret Boone Rappaport and astronomer Christopher Corbally, “proposing a context for the first rudimentary hominin moral systems.” This follows up on ideas published previously in *Zygon* (Rappaport and Corbally 2015), and draws on arguments by Italian colleague Ivan Colagè (2015).

The second article contributes to a contemporary debate among theologians: How useful is the concept of “*emergence*”? Joanna Leidenhag, a recent graduate from the religion and science program in Edinburgh, argues that it is overrated. “It is concluded that the basic logic of emergence theory, whereby matter is seen to precede mind, makes it difficult for emergent theologies to offer an account of salvation, avoid significant issues regarding God’s involvement with evil, and maintain divine transcendence. It is concluded, therefore, that Christian theology should look elsewhere for a complementary metaphysical framework with which to bridge scientific and theological discourse.”

*Iran* is the focus of the third contribution, by Mahdi Nasiri, Mostafa Azkia, and Seyyed Mohammad Sadegh Mahdavi. They offer a well-documented analysis of views on technology held by religious scholars of the leading seminaries in Qom. *Poland* is central to the next article by Maria Rogińska, who discusses the views of Polish scientists on science, religion, and meaning.

*John August Zahm* (1851–1921), priest and scientist, was one of the Catholic modernists reconciling science and faith in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this issue, Hans Moscicke discusses Zahm’s work, with a particular focus on the interaction among his views on science and hermeneutics and theological method in dealing with Scripture, considering similarities and differences with the approach of another Catholic modernist, Marie-Joseph Lagrange. Two book reviews complete this issue.

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## REFERENCES

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- Rappaport, Margaret Boone, and Christopher Corbally. 2015. “Matrix Thinking: An Adaptation at the Foundation of Human Science, Religion, and Art.” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 50:84–112.