

Editorial

CREATIVE CHALLENGES ON RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND KNOWLEDGE

HOW TO DO “RELIGION AND SCIENCE?”

In “science and religion,” there always are authors who reflect upon the conversation as such. What is this beast, “religion and science?” How should it be approached? Three articles with such a self-reflective orientation have been placed together in a thematic section.

Andrew B. Torrance has written a contribution that I consider very challenging, titled “Should a Christian Adopt Methodological Naturalism?” Both reviewers disagreed with the author’s point of view, but at least one considered this a thought-provoking contribution to the conversation. To understand why this article is perceived as challenging, let us consider the orientation of most contributors involved in “religion and science.” Almost all in this conversation are science-friendly; that is the point of the engagement in the first place. This science-friendly orientation brings with it an appreciation of the scientific approach, and thus of methodological naturalism. And almost all assume that one can be a methodological naturalist while being a Christian or adherent of another faith tradition. The methodological naturalist assumes, so it is often taken to be, that within the work of the scientist it is necessary, as a scientist, and appropriate, as a believer, to operate on naturalistic assumptions. In a recent article on advances in medicine, on diphtheria, the idea that “science is God’s provision” uses a naturalistic rhetorical strategy, appreciating as God’s gift modern medicine for the healing power it provides (Johnson 2017, 296). Torrance, in this issue, shares the science-friendly attitude, but argues that a Christian who is also a scientist need not assume a methodological naturalism. Rather, he argues that a committed Christian should avoid assuming methodological naturalism, a voice that deviates from the mainstream within our area of interdisciplinary discussion, and thus worth listening to.

Victoria Lorrimar considers “the created co-creator,” a central concept in the work of Philip Hefner, my predecessor as editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* and a regular contributor (e.g., Hefner 2016). To what extent can this understanding of humans be considered scientific? Does Hefner’s theological program have the structure of a scientific research program, as understood in the terms provided by Imre Lakatos (1978)? I leave it to the reader to ponder what Lorrimar has to offer on these

questions, and on the status of Hefner's anthropological and theological ideas.

Michael S. Burdett, a younger scholar from the United Kingdom, discusses the landscape, presenting us with "advice from the next generation." Each scholar needs to position oneself in relation to ongoing discussions and paradigmatic examples. However, he argues that we face various major shifts, which thus gives "the next generation" the advantage that they redefine the agenda. Again, a challenge, both for those who might be considered to belong to the same generation—does he really speak for "the next generation?"—and for older scholars—"what have we neglected so far?" Though over half a century young, *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* continues to welcome new voices, including those from graduate students and scholars early in their careers.

VARIETIES OF KNOWING IN "SCIENCE AND RELIGION"

A related theme is the status of knowledge, scientific and nonscientific, in our time. Concepts such as truth and objectivity, and the human ability to know the world and ourselves, are addressed in a thematic section in this issue. The articles have their origin in presentations at the 62nd Annual Conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, held at Star Island (New Hampshire, USA) from June 25 until July 1, 2016 (see www.IRAS.org).

J. Wentzel van Huyssteen asks a key question in the title of his contribution, "Can We Still Talk about 'Truth' and 'Progress' in Interdisciplinary Thinking Today?" Though evolution is driven by inclusive fitness rather than by rationality, we humans seem to have developed abilities at rational problem solving that go beyond that which is needed for survival. Jonathan Marks raises a question about rationality; Can we assume that we, humans, are able to acquire knowledge? "What If the Human Mind Evolved for Nonrational Thought?" But then, even if the main drivers in human evolution were not centered on knowledge *per se*, or even on rationality, but on facets that facilitate life in communities, might not the abilities we have acquired be such that we can acquire genuine knowledge by rational thinking and experimental work? Marks considers an anthropological perspective on cultures, which brings to light the irrationalities and inefficiencies involved. Overcoming our biases does not come easy; to paraphrase a title by Robert McCauley (2011), religion may be natural, while science is not, thus highlighting the fragility of science and its rationality (see Van Slyke 2014; McCauley 2014, 729).

In the next contribution in this section, Phillip Cary speaks of the turn "right-wing postmodernists," including himself and Alasdair MacIntyre, have made toward a major role for tradition, including religious traditions. Anthropologist Margaret Boone Rappaport and astronomer Christopher

Corbally go much further back, to the basis for morality as knowledge rooted in human biology (see also their earlier contribution in this journal (Rappaport and Corbally 2015)). In doing so, they seem to return to an orientation that was essential to Ralph Burhoe, the founding editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (Hefner 2014). Christian Early offers a contribution on ethics and love—not standard examples of knowledge, but they may have an element of knowledge as well. Taking David Hume’s notion of a “moral sentiment” as point of departure, Early presents a naturalistic view of morality, despite the fact–value distinction also associated with Hume.

Warren S. Brown and John A. Teske offer two contributions on the ways we know ourselves. Both avoid the turn inward, as if we would know ourselves by introspection. Brown concentrates on the way we know ourselves by interacting with our environment, and hence by our embodiment, the ways we are embedded in our context, and by our relations to others. Teske speaks of self-knowledge “by telling stories to ourselves,” an engagement with narrativist approaches to identity that have become quite prominent in contemporary philosophical anthropology (e.g., Taylor 1989; Schechtman 2011).

OTHER ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Travis Dumsday allows us to return to the topic of transhumanism, the idea that with modern technology we might transform into a species that is no longer human. How can we evaluate this expectation in relation to a theological perspective? And how does it do with respect to biological taxonomy—as transhumanism seems to speak of a future time as a different species? Chris Letheby’s contribution “Naturalizing Psychedelic Spirituality” picks up on a different style of transformation, not so much via technology but via drugs. Earlier, those were introduced in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* as entheogens, substances that bring one “into God” (Cole-Turner 2014; Richards 2014; Barnard 2014; Hummel 2014).

Whereas reflections on transhumanism and entheogens are driven by science and technological possibilities, Klaas Bom and Benno van den Toren have listened to Christian students from Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire, in Africa. For those students, “faith” seems to be more a given than for many Western students, while the understanding of “science” is less univocal. A personal, engaged style of Christianity is also typical of many with an evangelical or Pentecostal orientation. Benjamin Bennett-Carpenter considers the way people might use the expression that they have a “personal relationship with Jesus.” Insider discourse, the language of some believers—but how can it be understood by outsiders, relative to that community of faith? Bennett-Carpenter draws upon the humanities, but also upon evolutionary and cognitive psychology and biology.

The issue concludes with two reviews. The first is a contribution by Mladen Turk, our new book review editor, on *Advances in Religion, Cognitive Science, and Experimental Philosophy*, edited by Helen De Cruz and Ryan Nichols. And we also have in this issue a review essay by Javier Sánchez-Cañizares on a recent work of Roger Penrose, *Fashion, Faith and Fantasy in the New Physics of the Universe*. Penrose is a highly original British mathematician who has delved into cosmology (for instance, with work with Stephen Hawking on singularities), the philosophy of mathematics (as an outspoken Platonist), the interpretation of quantum physics, and the nature of consciousness. Challenging ideas are presented by the reviewer, who also engages related literature.

Altogether, this issue should provide you with enough challenges for three months—until our next issue.

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