

Editorial

TRANSVERSALITY, APOCALYPTIC AI, AND RACIAL SCIENCE

RELATIONALITY AND HEALTH: A TRANSVERSAL NEUROTHEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

This issue witnesses the long overdue publication of elements of Pat Bennett's doctoral thesis on relationality and health, for which she was awarded the ESSSAT Research Prize for 2014. Bennett's study brings together in a fruitful conversation medical literature, especially on neuroimmunology (links between "how we feel" and our immune system) and a theological vision of a healthily connected human person. She builds on Wentzel van Huyssteen's proposal in his Gifford Lectures of 2004 for the use of "transversality" as "a heuristic device that opens up new ways for crossing boundaries between disciplines." (van Huyssteen 2006, 112; for a recent exposition, see van Huyssteen 2017)

Christopher Southgate, who was the external examiner of Bennett's thesis, judged that Bennett's study (the first specific application of van Huyssteen's transversal model) "offers the opportunity to bring together theological motifs and scientific research in a much more open way than has been attempted in the science–theology debate of the last fifty years" (personal communication). I am happy that *Zygon* is now publishing this series of three articles by Bennett, which respectively critique earlier attempts at "neurotheology" (specifically those by James Ashbrook and Andrew Newberg), develop van Huyssteen's transversal model, and exemplify this model in addressing the question of whether experience of relational connection can affect health outcomes by directly moderating immune function.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND APOCALYPTICISM

The first of two symposia included in this issue contains contributions to a Panacea Society conference on Artificial Intelligence and Apocalypticism that was held in Bedford, England, on April 5–6, 2018. Artificial intelligence (AI) has always been a topic for science, technology, and religion. Recently, given rapid developments in the field of AI, attention paid to AI and religion has increased (becoming visible in the presence of thematic sections on AI in *Zygon* in at least this issue and the next).¹ The present thematic section on AI focuses on "Apocalyptic AI," which is the result of a

new integration by scientists and engineers of robotics, AI, and apocalyptic religious ideas (Geraci 2010a, 2010b).

After an introduction to the symposium (which includes links to earlier articles in *Zygon* on the topic) by guest editors Robert Geraci and Simon Robinson, four articles follow. Beth Singler addresses the central role that anxiety plays at the root of both existential hope and existential fear in Apocalyptic AI. Michael Morelli gives a Pauline reading of Apocalyptic AI, addressing the contemporary desire to comprehend “chatbots.” Victoria Lorrimar focuses on the theological dimension of mind uploading and embodied cognition, reflecting on the ends that the technology of disembodied AI might serve, and Syed Mustafa Ali addresses limitations of Geraci’s work on Apocalyptic AI with respect to the history and politics of race and colonialism; he discusses, in particular, the idea of “algorithmic racism.”

RACIAL SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Terence Keel’s *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (2018) forms the core material for the book symposium organized around it. Keel provokes new thinking about the relationship between religion and science. By focusing on the production of scientific knowledge over the past three centuries, he uncovers the persistent links between premodern Christian thought and contemporary scientific perceptions of human difference. He argues that modern scientific theories of race are an extension of Christian intellectual history. After a brief exposition by the author of the contents of his book, four critiques are offered (to which Keel at the end of the symposium responds).


Yiftach Fehige asks Keel to clarify whether he claims that Christianity was racist in itself in the sense of affirming the moral significance of racial differences or that Christianity enabled racism in a less direct manner. Ernie Hamm asks questions pertaining to Keel’s concept of “racial science,” for instance, whether a link can be demonstrated between Christianity’s long history of strained relations with Jews and any concept of “race” being at work in early Christianity. Jonathan Marks warns, with Keel, that modern scholarly boundaries do not map well on to nineteenth-century scholarship, and he highlights the imperviousness of scientific racism to Darwinism. Elizabeth Neswald touches on Keel’s reliance on the work of the twentieth-century German philosopher Hans Blumenberg; she takes the cue from Keel’s book to propose a more wide-ranging reanalysis of the science–religion nexus.

OTHER ARTICLES

And there is even more in this issue (my first as sole editor)! Besides three books reviews, there is an article by Geoffrey Cantor on the role of

“personality” in individual scientists’ ways of relating science and religion, an article by John Traphagan on similarities between the search for extraterrestrial intelligence and cargo cults in Melanesia, an article by Marcin Skladanowski on Russian distrustful self-definition concerning scientific and technological progress in the West, and an article by Paul Kaplick, Yaqub Chaudhary, Abdullah Hasan, Asim Yusuf, and Hooman Keshavarzi on an interdisciplinary research methodology for basic research in Islamic psychology.

And—as if all of this is not yet enough for one single issue—we begin the issue with a timely contribution on science, religion, and public policy. Anticipating the upcoming IRAS Summer Conference “The CRISPR Apple on the Tree of Knowledge: Bioengineering, Gene Editing, and the Human Future” on Star Island, June 22–29, 2019, program co-chair Ted Peters calls for regulations that combine an openness to the fruits of new technologies with an ethically and spiritually fed guiding vision of “optimum human health, planetary flourishing, and universal participation in the common good.”

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NOTE

1. This increased attention also includes the need for adequate public policy responses (see, for instance, the most recent IRAS Summer Conference, held on Star Island, June 23–30, 2018, which was titled “Artificial Intelligence Turns Deep: Who’s in Control?”).

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