

# Editorial

## ETHICS, COLLECTIVES, AND DRUGS

### SCIENCE AND ETHICS

Both the book symposium on John Evans's *Morals Not Knowledge: Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict between Religion and Science* (2018) and *The Boyle Lecture 2019* deal with the relationship between science and ethics.<sup>1</sup> Evans's goal in his book is to show that the real conflict between science and religion over the past half century in the United States is about ethics and not about epistemology. Michael Reiss, in his Boyle Lecture, focuses on how science can help us understand the genesis of ethics in evolution and how religion is needed to shape our ethics.

The book symposium on *Morals Not Knowledge* was initiated shortly after I had been appointed as the editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Willem Drees and I had agreed on an initial list of invitees and I subsequently added further invitations when I had fully taken over as editor. In the end, I was able to collect the set of four contributions and Evans's response that are published together in this issue. First, Mark Harris offers a defense of theological contributions by an "elite" of science-and-religion academics. He claims that there is value in seeing science and religion in terms of a single knowledge system; while the public's moral questions may not always be tackled directly in some academic contributions, there is a need for ethics to engage with advancements in human knowledge and self-understanding. Second, Fern Elsdon-Baker agrees with Evans that there is a growing body of social science research that evidences there are various ways in which religious publics might negotiate a rejection of one scientific truth claim without having to dismantle the entirety of the scientific corpus; she adds that this is a trend that has also been observed in studies outside of the United States. She claims that more social science is needed to uncover what is really driving the enduring social narrative that there is an intrinsic conflict between "science" and "religion." Third, Elaine Howard Ecklund, Sharan Mehta, and Daniel Bolger emphasize that some voices are missing from Evans's analysis: racial and ethnic minorities, religious communities (as opposed to individuals), members of minority religious traditions, and everyday religious scientists. Attending to these voices would reveal, for instance, the perceived bias of science against the health and well-being of black Americans, the filtering of the moral salience of particular scientific issues through the practices of local congregational communities, the conflation between Christianity and religion that often arises in public rhetoric around the science-and-religion debate, and the

way the religious views of rank-and-file scientists could serve as a bridge between the two communities of science and religion. Fourth, Nathan Crick uncovers the political and rhetorical dimensions of Evans's book: the book responds to a moral responsibility to rhetorically intervene in a political impasse, for example, on climate change, by pragmatically redescribing the situation so as to open up the possibility of new alliances based on the realization of common cause, and it replaces the opposition narrative between morality and knowledge with the methodological dictum "morality through inquiry" (stemming from the tradition of pragmatic moral philosophy). As can be concluded, the contributions to the book symposium span a wide range of responses, from different disciplines and with hardly any overlap. Evans's response therefore separately covers each contribution.

In this year's Boyle Lecture, Michael Reiss discusses the relationship between science, religion, and ethics. He addresses the questions of how we decide what is "morally right" and "morally wrong," and of how science, and especially evolutionary biology, might contribute to our joint decision-making in an age and society that apparently lacks moral consensus. Janet Soskice provides a response to Reiss's Boyle Lecture; she finds herself agreeing with his diagnoses of the present situation, but has some disagreement with his account of its causes or possible solution. Reiss may have overestimated the extent to which scripture-based religions derived their ethical frameworks from scripture and underestimated the historical autonomy of ethical deliberation.

#### RELIGION AND COLLECTIVES

The thematic section on "The Collective Nature of Religion" brings together two social scientific articles, one on religious congregations and another on collective prayer. Ryan and Megan Byerly advocate for an interdisciplinary study of the collective character traits of local religious congregations (taking local Christian churches as their focal example) that mirrors the now widespread interdisciplinary study of the character traits of individuals. They examine two candidate virtues of churches—collective inclusiveness and collective reconciliation. In a similar vein, Joshua Cockayne and Gideon Salter argue that more attention needs to be paid to the nature and value of corporate prayer. They suggest that what is central to corporate prayer is a "sense of sharedness" that can be established through a variety of means—through bodily interactions or through certain environments; also, corporate prayer enables common knowledge and an alignment between participants.


#### MYSTICISM AND DRUGS

The topic of drug-enabled mystical experiences is covered comprehensively in the subsequent thematic section. The first article, by Virginia Ballesteros,

develops an argument on why drug-enabled visionary experiences can help fight moral blindness. She draws on intellectuals such as William James, Aldous Huxley, and Günther Anders. She proposes that mystical experiences are a means to improve our moral faculties—and that psychedelic drugs can function as tools to enable them. The second article, by Richard Jones, offers a thorough review of the scientific study of drug-enabled mystical experiences, which complements his recent review of the neuroscientific study of mystical experiences (Jones 2018). He concludes that there is to date no nontheological reason to suspect that drug-enabled mystical experiences are any different in nature from those occasioned by meditation or those occurring spontaneously. While mystical experiences are distinct from other types of experience, science cannot answer the central questions of philosophical importance.

#### OTHER ARTICLES

This issue further contains three articles in the general articles section and one book review. Gábor Ambrus reflects on science fiction as an imaginative domain that can offer a unique understanding of the interaction between science and religion; he illustrates this using the idea of the artificial humanoid as brought to life in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the recent television series *Westworld*. Joseph Bracken makes a renewed proposal for Christian theologians to use the language and current methodology of science as far as possible so as to present the content of Church teaching in an idiom that would be intelligible not only to scientists but to the educated public as well. Eugene Curry reraises the question of mission among extraterrestrials; he makes recommendations concerning future potential exomissionary screening criteria and emphasizes the role of animals in God's work. Finally, Lluís Oviedo reviews Brett Frischmann and Evan Selinger's *Re-Engineering Humanity*, which deals with the influences and changes that technical advances bring to the human condition.

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#### NOTE

1. Evans (2018) does not define “ethics” (vis-à-vis “morality”). Reiss defines “ethics” as “the branch of philosophy concerned with how we should decide what is morally wrong and what is morally right.” In the context of this *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* issue, keeping a clear distinction between ethics and morality is not really necessary, however.

REFERENCES

- Evans, John. 2018. *Morals Not Knowledge: Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict between Religion and Science*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Jones, Richard H. 2018. "Limitations on the Neuroscientific Study of Mystical Experiences." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 53: 992–1017.