

Editorial

ROBOTIC AI, CRISPR, AND FREE WILL

If you read this soon after publication, we will still be finding ourselves in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis. I would like to use this opportunity to thank all people involved in the production of this issue (authors, editorial staff, and Wiley production staff) for continuing to work on the issue and getting it published, while being confronted with much changed and often very difficult circumstances. I do sincerely hope that the worst is already behind us, and that you are all well and able to engage in the science-and-religion discussion. Readers who were planning to attend the 2020 IRAS Conference on “Naturalism—*as* Religion, *within* Religions, or *without* Religion?” will be aware that it has been postponed until next year. Information about the new date and further details will naturally be published under the Announcements in future issues of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ROBOTICS

The first thematic section of this issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* includes three articles from the Annual Meeting 2019 of the UK’s Science and Religion Forum on “AI and Robotics: The Science, Opportunities, and Challenges,” held in Durham from April 11–13, 2019. Gillian Straine introduces the thematic section and provides a summary of the meeting. Michael Burdett focuses on personhood and creation in an age of artificial intelligence; he explores the extent to which the I–You relation should be applied to domains other than the human and the divine focusing particularly on artifacts and technology. Yaqub Chaudhary focuses on how AI and virtual and augmented reality reconstruct mind and world: humans and machines, as well as the artificial worlds of cyberspace and the real world, are being brought into ontological continuity, he claims. Finally, David Hipple uses the insights of science fiction to explore the limits of AI and the public reception of technological advances; he addresses human receptiveness to the numinous, and the capacity to ascribe personality and even divinity to sufficiently impressive manifestations, even artificial ones.

THE CRISPR APPLE ON THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The next thematic section has been put together by the program co-chairs (Arvin Gouw and Ted Peters) of the 65th annual IRAS summer conference

on Star Island, held from June 22–29, 2019. The title of this conference was: “The CRISPR Apple on the Tree of Knowledge: Bioengineering, Gene Editing, and the Human Future.” Arvin Gouw provides an introduction to the section, which highlights and samples the discussions and presentations from the conference, and which is organized into three broad topics: CRISPR in science, ethics, and religion. Gouw’s subsequent article gives readers an overview about the science of CRISPR. Roger Adams addresses the moral decisions that come into play when modifying human germ lines. Connie Bertka considers what Unitarian Universalism might contribute to answering questions surrounding CRISPR, that is, “Who do we trust?” and “When is it time to act?” Finally, Linda Groff contributes the poem that she wrote and distributed during the conference.


BUDDHISM AND FREE WILL

The book symposium on Rick Repetti’s recent book *Buddhism, Meditation, and Free Will: A Theory of Mental Freedom* (2019) places an intriguing question set pertaining to freedom, determinism, and indeterminism in the context of potential answers from Buddhism—usually not the first place where people look for supporting the existence of free will. This book symposium was organized by Christian Coseru, who brought together three critics and the author at a session of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association meeting in New York from January 7–10, 2020. It opens with an introduction by Coseru and closes off with a response to all contributors by Repetti. Repetti’s argument is that both Western and Buddhist philosophical objections to free will can be refuted and that a form of agency can be found within Buddhism; he proposes a “compatibilist” conception of free will. In his book, he explains how Buddhist meditation increases self-regulative mind-control abilities, and he argues that “the Buddhist path is designed to produce meditation virtuosos exhibiting mind-control abilities far exceeding the free-will advocate’s ability to ‘do otherwise’ or have their choices be ‘up to’ them.” His first critic in the symposium, Gregg Caruso, responds that not only is Buddhism best conceived as endorsing a kind of free will skepticism, Buddhist ethics can provide a helpful guide to living without free will. The second critic, David Cummiskey, focuses on how Repetti’s compatibilist conception of free will seems to entail a commitment to a Kantian conception of autonomy, which he argues is in direct conflict with the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. The third, and final, critic, Karin Meyers, argues that although the Buddhist path requires and enhances the kind of mental and volitional control Repetti describes, the central dynamic of the path and meditation is better understood as a process of habituation. With the critical points and counterpoints raised about Buddhism and free will, this book symposium

as a whole offers, as Coseru states, “a compelling example of the value of systematic cross-cultural philosophy.”

OTHER ARTICLES

This issue starts with three articles. En-Chieh Chao performed a careful study of science, religion, and the invention of *halal* stunning in New Zealand; she describes the intricate ontological turns and webs of interaction between religion and science, the social and the biological, in the creation of a new slaughtering method. Graeme Finlay takes the workings and evolution of the placenta, which he lucidly describes in his article, as a starting point for theological reflections, including on random processes and divine action, the pathogenic potential of such processes and divine goodness, and the connection of these processes with human relationality. Chammah Judex Kaunda’s article employs the (Zambian) Bemba notion of mystico-relationality in dialogue with the concepts of “created co-creator” and Christ the Key, while arguing for the possibility of artificial general intelligence possessing the image of God. The issue concludes with a book review: Jerome Ravetz reviews Peter Coviello’s *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism*, a book which turns out to hold some interesting insights for science-and-religion.

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REFERENCE

Repetti, Rick. 2019. *Buddhism, Meditation, and Free Will: A Theory of Mental Freedom*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.