

Editorial

SCIENCE FICTION AND METHODOLOGY

SCIENCE FICTION'S IMAGINED TECHNOLOGIES

This issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* includes three articles from a panel organized by this journal on “The Nuts and Bolts of Transformation: Science Fiction’s Imagined Technologies and the Civic Imagination,” which was held at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in San Diego on November 24, 2019. The panel’s goal was to explore how science fiction both cultivates and intervenes in the ways that we imagine technology’s role in society, both present and future. Through a variety of narrative and representative means, works of science fiction can both model potential versions of our sociotechnical future and provide the thinking ground for critical reflection on the role of various technologies in the present. Emanuelle Burton, co-organizer of the panel, introduces the thematic section and the larger setting of the panel (which featured six speakers). Michelle Marvin’s article studies the phenomenon of memory-altering technologies in *Westworld* and shows that unreconciled altered traumatic memory may lead to a dystopian breakdown of society; she emphasizes connections between memory altering technologies and humanity’s responsibility to remember rightly. Nathan Schradle’s article assesses current attitudes toward artificial intelligence and quantum computing from works that do not self-represent as a science fiction but that offer near-future imaginaries; he argues that they represent a modern-day form of magical thinking. Finally, Zhange Ni’s article turns attention to imaginary worlds around the magical practice of Chinese alchemy fused with science and technology, in a new fantasy subgenre that emerged in contemporary China, *xiuzhen xiaoshuo* (immortality cultivation fiction); she shows how this subgenre reconceptualizes Western transhumanism.

METHODOLOGY IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The book symposium on Josh Reeves’s recent book *Against Methodology in Science and Religion: Recent Debates on Rationality and Theology* (2019) addresses a central question in the field of science and religion, as it has developed over the last few decades: the compatibility (or not) of theology and science according to theories of scientific methodology or rationality. Reeves argues against the methodological compatibility strategy. This book symposium was organized by Paul Allen, who chaired an author-meets-critics session at the annual meeting of the AAR in San Diego on

November 23, 2019. In his own contribution to the book symposium, Paul Allen maintains that the philosophical perspective of critical realism combines the objective truth reached through inference and especially cognitive acts of judgment as well as the various, contingent historical contexts that also define where science is practiced; he thus argues against the approach by Reeves to take a primarily historical perspective. James Stump agrees with Reeves that there is no essence to activities labeled “science” that allows them to be objectively identified and demarcated from “non-science,” which means what qualifies as science is determined by communities; however, he claims that Reeves has relied too much on analytic traditions and neglected continental philosophers, and he suggests a need to articulate a theory of consensus. Pete Jordan addresses the issue of legitimacy and the field of science and religion. He looks at the role of “distance” (from “objects” such as science and religion) and its effects on judgments of legitimacy, surveying the factors that affect those judgments up close and from afar, and posing questions that anyone designing a strategy to increase the perceived legitimacy of an object might ask. Jaime Wright welcomes Reeves’s proposal for an anti-essentialist future for the field of science and religion; he suggests in particular a need to study popular culture and its artifacts such as literature, which portray a comingling of religion and science at the level of day-to-day experiences and practices of characters. Victoria Lorrimar sets the “credibility strategy” (the recruitment of scientific methods by theologians to lend credibility to their theological claims) addressed by Reeves in historical context with an exploration of some of the science and religion field’s original commitments and goals. She suggests that true dialogue between scientific and theological ideas might be better fostered if it were to be expanded beyond the formal field of science and religion and engaged specific scientific proposals. Reeves offers a response to each of these critiques consecutively, under the following four headings: “Realism,” “Truth and Community,” “Legitimacy,” and “Expanding the Conversation in Science and Religion.”

THEISTIC EVOLUTION AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

In this issue’s Comment and Response section, Christoffer Skogholt comments on Mikael Leidenhag’s (2019) article in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, and Leidenhag responds. The issue under debate is whether arguments for theistic evolution that rely on “natural divine causation” can really be distinguished from arguments for intelligent design. Skogholt argues that Leidenhag has actually identified a crucial difference between theistic evolution and religious naturalism, instead of showing that the arguments that he considers for theistic evolution make God redundant. In Leidenhag’s response, he reasserts that natural divine causation cannot be used as a demarcation line between theistic evolution and intelligent

design, and he emphasizes a more viable form of theistic evolution through “partial causation.”

OTHER ARTICLES

We have five articles to open this issue. Ziba Norman and Michael Reiss deal with topical issue of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious practice (particularly through the approach taken by societies to deal with such risk); they argue that if in the longer term, Christian practice were to become separated from its sacramental roots, it would radically alter Christianity. Yuanlin Guo and Hans Radder contribute an article on science policy and philosophy of science, where they investigate Chinese practice-oriented views of science and their political grounds. They argue that a stronger focus on basic science is called for and that this can be supported by critical reflection on the downsides or limits of the Chinese technoscientific approach, drawing also on moral, spiritual or religious values. John Evans, in his empirical sociological study of a “mediating organization” between theologians and the public, compares the structure of the debate about human enhancement among theologians with the debate on this topic among the laity; he finds that the basic divides among the theologians are largely replicated, which allows for reflections on their influence. Shoaib Malik and Elvira Kulieva challenge contemporary Muslim theologian Nuh Ha Mim Keller’s claim that belief in human evolution would entail “*kufi*” (disbelief); a critical review of his argumentation (involving the science of evolution, naturalism, and creation in Islamic scripture) reveals that Keller has overlooked other possibilities, and that believing in evolution does not necessarily or definitively entail *kufi*. Emily Qureshi-Hurst and Anna Pearson, in the final article, examine the recently studied quantum mechanical phenomenon of “Indefinite Causal Order”; they offer a penetrating analysis of quantum mechanics, time, and theology, and identify a new approach to salvation through interpreting the Indefinite Causal Order phenomenon. Two book reviews complete the issue: Varadaraja Raman reviews Alok Kumar’s *Ancient Hindu Science: Its Transmission and Impact on World Cultures*, and Jonathan Chappell reviews Raymond Tallis’s *The Mystery of How We Make Sense of the World*.

REORGANIZATION OF THE EDITORIAL OFFICE

In conjunction with the retirement on October 1, 2020 of our long-standing Assistant Editor, Deb Van der Molen, we are undertaking a reorganization of the Editorial Office, with a smaller office (financially supported by CASIRAS-held funds earmarked for *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*) remaining at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and all manuscript-related communications shifting to Wiley’s Managing Editor services. Dave Glover will remain in the Chicago Office as Editorial

Assistant (with a reduced number of hours) for all nonmanuscript-related editorial office tasks, including offering administrative support for the nonprofit corporation behind the journal. I would like to thank both Deb and Dave here for their incredible dedication to the journal, which has been a significant contributor to its success over the past few decades.

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