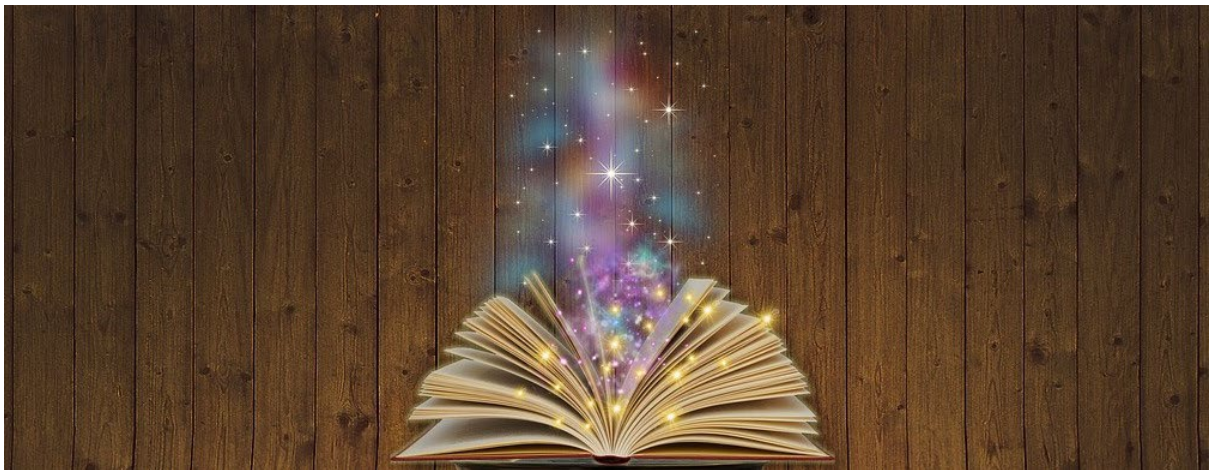




Science and Religion Forum 50th Anniversary Conference

Revisiting and Reimagining the Relationships between Science and Religion



**Please note paper dates/timings may be subject to change ahead
of the conference.**

Conference Information

**28th May – 31st May 2025
Halifax Hall, Sheffield**



Schedule Pre Conference Activity & Gowland Lecture Wednesday 28th May

	Dining Room	The Library	Ennis Room
15:30 – 16:00	<i>Science & Religion in Education Networking</i>		
16:00 – 16:30	<i>Early Career Networking</i>		
17:00 – 18:00		REGISTRATION for conference attendees	
18:30 – 19:00	Gowland Reception in the Library		
19:00 – 21:00	Gowland Lecture in the Dining Room Bishop Richard Cheetham (Dr Muthuraj Swamy)		

Schedule Day 1 Thursday 29th May

	Dining Room	The Library	Ennis Room
	Halifax Hall residents Breakfast (served 7:00 – 10:00)	REGISTRATION for conference attendees	
8:30 – 9:00	Arrival Tea & Coffee		
9:00 – 9:10	Opening Remarks		
9:15 – 10:00	SP1 Maureen Smith; Navigating the Intersection: Early Career Teachers' Perceptions of religion in science classrooms	SP2 E. Harold Breitenberg Jr.; The Persistence of Design Language	SP3 Gabriella DiPrima; The Age of Adam: A Metaphysical Framework for Reconciling Biblical Literalism with Modern Climatology
10:10 – 10:30	NV1 Aidan Kennedy; Does Cognitive Power Create a Person? Analysing the Catholic Approaches to personhood in Dementia	NV2 Ralphael Mees; In Defence of Natural Philosophy, or The Compatibility Between Science and Theism	NV3 Rashad Rehman; Josef Pieper on Scientism: A Novel Contribution
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break	Science & Religion in Ministry/Pastoral Theology	Early Career Networking
11:00 – 12:15	KEYNOTE 1: Bowie, Guilfoyle & Reiss: Science, Education & Religion		
12:15 – 13:15	LUNCH		
13:15 – 13:35	NV4 Marnix t'Hart; Where Neuroscience and Biblical Exegesis Meet: Romans 7:15 and the anterior mid-cingulate cortex	NV5 Sam McKee; The theistic implications in the work of Sir James Jeans	NV6 Ge Lei, Zen Buddhism and Science: Reimagining the Relationship Beyond Conflict Theory from a Chinese Perspective
13:45 – 15:00	KEYNOTE 2 Round Table: Continuity & Divergence: how much are past science and religion dialogues likely to shape their future		
15:00 – 15:30	Coffee Break		



15:30 – 16:15	SP4 Finley Lawson; Primas' Unus Mundus: Against a Dualist Account of reality	SP5 Thoko Kamwendo; 3 Cheers for Barbour	SP6 Martin Sahlen; Science Education and Worldview Formation: A Big Bang Case Study
16:25 – 17:10	SP7 Tinni Goswami; Vedic astronomy during Colonial Bengal – A Case Study	SP8 Berel Dov Lerner; Three Jewish Thinkers on the Religious Significance of the Size of the Universe	SP9 Khaled Meghnine; Navigating Islamic Beliefs and Modern Science: Perspectives from University-Educated Algerians
17:20 – 17:30	Plenary		
19:00 – 21:00	DINNER		

Schedule Day 2 Friday 30th May

	Dining Room	The Library	Ennis Room
	Halifax Hall residents Breakfast (served 7:00 – 10:00)	REGISTRATION	
8:45 – 9:15	Arrival Tea & Coffee		
9:00 – 9:30	Science & Religion in Ministry/Pastoral Theology	Science & Religion in Education Networking	Early Career Networking
9:30 – 10:45	KEYNOTE 3: Pritchard: The Church & AI		
10:45 – 11:15	Coffee Break		
11:15 – 12:30	Peacocke Prize Award Presentation & Winning Paper with Q&A		
12:30 – 13:30	LUNCH		
13:30 – 14:15	SP10 WITHDRAWN	SP11 Travis Dumsday; Moderating the Meta-Historical Fall: Recent Eastern Orthodox Theodicies of Evolution	SP12 Damian Mingle; AI as the Third Epistemology: Reimagining Science and Religion Beyond Human Cognition
14:25 – 15:10	SP13 Ayesha Qurratulain; Reason, Revelation, and Evolution: the Encounter of Islamic Thought with Modern Science in Colonial India	SP14 Agana-Nsiire Agana; Priming the Historiography of Science and Religion in Africa	SP15 Scott Ryan Maybell; The Devil is all in your mind: reflexivity and the impact of the psychosocial sciences on Satanic scripture
15:10 – 15:30	Coffee Break		
15:30 – 16:45	Keynote 4: Stenmark: 'fences on the epistemological prairie'		
16:45 – 16:55	Plenary		
17:00 – 17:30			Forum Town Hall, find out about the working groups & wider opportunities – open session



19:30 – 22:00	FORMAL CONFERENCE DINNER & After Dinner Speaker (drinks from 19:00)
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Schedule Day 3 Saturday 31st May

	Dining Room	The Library	Ennis Room
	Halifax Hall residents Breakfast (served 7:30 – 10:30)	REGISTRATION	
9:45 – 10:15	Arrival Tea & Coffee		
10:15 – 11:00	SP16 Carlos Piccone-Camere; Rethinking Human Dignity in the Age of AI: Transhumanism, Posthumanism, and Theological Reflections in Antiqua et Nova	SP17 Adam Swiezynski; Religion and science in the view of Valentin Voyno-Yasenetsky An input to the discussion on the status and role of Christian Philosophy	SP18 Kyriaki Grammnou; Suffering and Dying in Modern Pandemics: A Parallel Reading of I. Illich, G. Agamben and B. - C. Han
11:10 – 11:55	SP19 Roger Pullin; A Substance Dualistic Model of the Human Self	SP20 Ning Xu; The Holy Spirit and the Christian Experience: Does Christian theology need psychology in studying pneumatology in the Book of Acts?	SP21 Kieran Evans; A Phenomenology of the 'New Biology': a reimagination of the relationship between science and religion through embodiment.
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH		
13:00 – 14:15	Keynote 5: Bossoh: Medicine, Science & Religion		
14:15 – 14:30	Conference Plenary		
END BOOKING 15:00			

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X/Twitter: https://twitter.com/SciRelForum_SRF

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/411289328147318>



2025 Gowland Lecture

GOWLAND LECTURE: Science and Religion – a vital engagement, but where next? Why context, community and communication really matter

Lecturer: Dr Bishop Richard Cheetham & Revd Dr Muthraj Swamy (Responding)

ABSTRACT: Most of the literature on the relationship between science and religion has been produced in a Western context with an emphasis on the Christian religion. However, there is increasing awareness of the wisdom and insights generated in many different contexts, cultures and religions, including indigenous knowledge. There is also a growing appreciation that some of the major issues of the 21st century (e.g. AI, genetics, climate change and biodiversity loss etc) require far more than a narrow focus scientific analysis from a predominantly western viewpoint. In a globalized, hyper-connected world, these issues need to be explored with ethical, philosophical, spiritual and theological lenses. It is crucially important to pay close attention to the effect of context on how the science and religion relationship is understood. This lecture will explore how such an inter-contextual approach is working in the Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science (ECLAS) project and also in the work of the Anglican Communion Science Commission, and outline some principles for a genuinely fruitful science and religion relationship in the future.



Bishop Richard Cheetham's main focus is now on the growing work in the relationship between science and religion. He is co-director for global engagement with Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science (ECLAS) and a member of the Anglican Communion Science Commission (ACSC). He is also a Fellow of the International Society for Science and Religion, an Assistant Bishop in the Dioceses of Guildford and Southwark, and part of the clergy team at St Martin's Church, Dorking.

He has had a deep interest in the relationship between science and religion since his teenage years. His first degree was in physics and philosophy, graduating in 1977 from Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He then taught physics in secondary schools for five years. His doctorate from King's College, London was completed in 1999 and explored the nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain, with particular reference to the concept of "truth" as reflected by acts of collective worship in a sample of Luton schools.

Muthuraj Swamy the Director of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide (since 2018). As part of this role, he teaches and supervises in the University of Cambridge and in the Cambridge Theological Federation. He has also been working at the Anglican Communion Office, London – as Project Manager for Theological Education until 2018–2024, and currently as Theological Facilitator and Researcher for the Equipping Christian Leaders in an Age of Science supporting the work of the Anglican Communion Science Commission through ECLAS resources and projects.



Muthuraj researches in the fields of Religious Studies, Theology and World Christianity with the focus on religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, ecumenism, contextual theologies, Christian public engagement, and science-faith relations.

Join the Gowland Lecture online live, and take part in the Q&A: xxxxx



Keynote Lectures

KEYNOTE 1: Round Table: Big Questions in Science-and-Religion Education

Prof Bob Bowie, Dr Liam Guilfoyle and Prof. Michael Reiss

ABSTRACT: Pending

Awaiting Bio



KEYNOTE 2: Round Table Continuity & Divergence: how much are past science and religion dialogues likely to shape their future

Bishop Richard Cheetham and colleagues

ABSTRACT: pending

Waiting bio



KEYNOTE 3: AI and the Church

Dr Kathryn Pritchard

ABSTRACT: pending

Awaiting bio



KEYNOTE 4: Fences on the epistemological prairie - unsettling science and religion

Dr Lisa Stenmark

ABSTRACT: pending

Awaiting bio



KEYNOTE 5: Science, religion, and the material turn: exploring global potentials through museum colonial collections

Dr Nathan Bossoh

ABSTRACT: Over the last few decades the history of science discipline has shifted – with noticeable progress – from Western-focused narratives towards more globalised histories of science. In comparison, however, the subdiscipline ‘history of science and religion’ has, only in the last decade, begun to make this shift beyond Christian-focused Eurocentric boundaries.

In their 2011 book *Science and Religion Around the World*, John Brooke and Ronald Numbers attempted to map out a viable approach to globalising histories of science and religion, yet the work highlighted more issues than it solved. One reason these issues have prevailed, I suggest, remains due to approaches and methodologies. Whilst historians have paid much attention to the various intellectual and social contexts of science and religion in history, they have paid less attention to the material contexts. In this talk therefore, utilising the results from my previous research into the ‘Wellcome African materials’ held by the London Science Museum, I explore a currently underutilised, yet fruitful, mode of investigation. By incorporating indigenous narratives embedded in colonial museum collections into histories of science and religion, I argue that material histories can enrich current scholarship.

Furthermore, in bringing the history of science and religion more firmly into contact with museum studies, my research sits alongside emerging trends within the field which increasingly seek to position the history of science and religion as a more public-facing arena of research that can speak directly to key contemporary social, political, national, and international discussions and debates.



Nathan Bossoh is a Research Fellow in History at Southampton University where his main research is situated around the intersections of science, medicine, and African collections. He is currently undertaking a project that examines the rise of herbal medicine research in colonial and post-colonial Ghana with a focus on the relationship between ethnobotanical knowledge, pharmacology, and museum collections. Nathan is the co-curator of The Kola Nut Cannot Be Contained, an exhibition held at Wellcome Collection, London between July 2024 and February 2025, which explored the global histories, vibrant traditions, and contemporary innovations surrounding the West African Kola nut fruit.

PEACOCKE STUDENT ESSAY PRIZE: Cycles of Life and Blood: A Theology of Menstruation

Cayla Bleoaja

ABSTRACT: This paper proposes a theological framework that situates menstruation as a sacred, liturgical act of divine-human encounter, integrating biological and Christian spiritual insights. Menstruation, a recurring process in women’s lives, is a distinctive biological rhythm unique among mammals. Theologically, blood—pivotal in Hebrew and Christian traditions—embodies life, atonement, and covenant, reaching its fullest expression in Christ’s crucifixion and Eucharistic presence, where it mediates divine life. Drawing from early Christian views of the body as sacramental, medieval images of Christ’s feminized form, and modern theologies of embodiment, this paper proposes a conceptualization of menstruation as an embodied liturgy. The menstrual cycle—marked by hormonal shifts, bleeding, and renewal—reflects God’s creative, kenotic engagement with the world, elevating women’s blood as a sacred sign of divine solidarity and life-giving power



Cayla Bleoaja is reading for an MSt in Science and Religion at the University of Oxford. Her work, academic and artistic, examines the God-world relation and its psychosociological implications. She previously completed an MSc in Sociology at Oxford as a Barry Scholar, and spent a year in Romania as a Fulbright research scholar. She is a performing artist, published poet, and friend to all trees.



Short Papers

PAPER 1: Navigating the Intersection: Early Career Teachers' Perceptions of religion in science classrooms

Maureen Smith; Birmingham Newman University

ABSTRACT: The interplay between science and religion has long been a contentious issue, particularly within educational contexts where early career teachers are tasked with navigating these complex dynamics in science classrooms. This essay investigates early career teachers' perceptions of the role of religion in science education, highlighting the challenges they face in balancing scientific inquiry with respect for students' diverse belief systems. Through an examination of personal beliefs, cultural contexts, and educational backgrounds, the study reveals that early career teachers often experience tension between integrating religious perspectives and adhering to secular scientific principles. The findings underscore the necessity for professional development that equips educators with strategies for fostering inclusivity and critical thinking in their classrooms. By encouraging open dialogue, promoting analytical skills, and respecting diverse perspectives, early career teachers can create an educational environment where science and religion coexist harmoniously. Ultimately, this balanced approach not only enhances students' learning experiences but also cultivates a more inclusive society, preparing students to thoughtfully engage with the complexities of the world around them.

PAPER 2: The Persistence of Design Language

E. Harold Breitenberg Jr; Randolph-Macon College

ABSTRACT: A curious persistence of design language is evident in contemporary descriptions of biological evolution. While this occurs most often in reports about recent scientific findings that appear in newspapers, magazines, websites, and the popular press, design language also occasionally shows up in academic writing. For example, a New York Times article, "Your Body Knows You're Burned Out," notes that a University of California, Berkeley, social psychologist commented that human bodies were "not designed for the kinds of stressors that we face today." A National Public Radio report, titled "Golden Arches: Human Feet More Flexible Than We Thought," concludes with the statement "You want your foot to be able to move and flatten because that's what it's designed to do." An article in The Guardian claims "In a plant, a single brain would be a fatal flaw because they have evolved to be lunch." And the booklet, Science, Evolution, and Creationism, published by the National Academy of Sciences (USA) observes: "The guppies in the river mature faster, are smaller, and give birth to more and smaller offspring than the guppies in the streams do because guppies with these traits are better able to avoid their predator in the river than are larger guppies." Numerous other publications use similar language, implying purpose, intention, design, etc., to describe conditions produced through evolution.

This paper explores the widespread use of design language in both mass market and scientific publications. Although such descriptions may be accounted for as imprecise terminology, used to convey information in ways that can be understood by non-specialists, the persistence of design language can also create an impression of intentionality, purpose, and goal in biological evolution.

I call attention to numerous other descriptions of biological evolution that use the language of design, purpose, and intention, in order to highlight the extent and durability of such terminology. I bring these descriptions into conversation with academic literature such as Michael Ruse's book, Darwin and Design. I also raise questions about how design language may give rise to misconceptions about evolution as well as ways in which the persistence of design language may indicate a continuing intuition of purpose that resonates with religious notions of creation, but in ways that are significantly different from the perspectives advanced by proponents of Intelligent Design.



PAPER 3: The Age of Adam: A Metaphysical Framework for Reconciling Biblical Literalism with Modern Climatology

Gabriella DiPrima; Wofford College

ABSTRACT: There is a concerning number of Christians in America today who refuse to interact with climatology findings on the basis that climate scientists presume a 4.54 billion year old Earth and many Protestant denominations insist upon a literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that excludes belief in an old Earth. This essay posits a metaphysical framework that can allow those who refuse to part with Biblical literalism to accept climate science by distinguishing between the “literal” age of the Earth and the “apparent” age of the Earth. This framework raises the question of whether the origins of all categories of matter must take an infant form, even if that infant form has to be entirely inferred and imagined. This essay will also make an account for the theological differences that necessitate Biblical literalism for Protestants, making it unlikely that they would be reconciled to climatology without new metaphysics, and advocate for a specifically Christian responsibility to exercise concern and care for the climate.

PAPER 4: Primas’ Unus Mundus: Against a Dualist Account of reality

Finley Lawson; Canterbury Christ Church University

ABSTRACT: When investigating human nature at the intersection of philosophy, science, and theology, one must engage with the Cartesian legacy. Whilst it may seem that the Cartesian legacy is undermined by both scientific investigation and the claims of the Christian materialist, this paper argues that the dichotomous narrative is both mistaken in terms of viewing Christian materialism as truly materialistic and in assuming that contemporary science requires a “traditional” materialist account of human nature and the nature of fundamental reality. Whilst the Christian materialist is not “truly” materialist at a global level, but only a local, humane level, the distinction they propose is grounded in Cartesianism. Whilst there is much that could be said on the specific formulations of dualism that may be permissible within a scientific context, this paper argues instead that the dualist distinction exists only for the scientist, and only at a methodological level. Dualism is not an accurate ontological commitment. Drawing on the work of quantum chemist Hans Primas the paper will argue that reality consists of an unbroken mind-matter unity, that requires the scientist and theologian alike to make a distinction between “scientific” metaphysics and “global metaphysics”. Within Primas’ metaphysics there is a deep commitment to a nonmaterial realm and a recognition that we must not mistake the Cartesian “fiction” for an ontological reality. This paper examines how a scientifically informed holistic reality (in Primas’ terms a unified Unus Mundus) radically challenges our theological and philosophical accounts of human nature and asks attendees to consider the implications of “non-Boolean” metaphysics for our understanding of the distinction and uniqueness of persons in a holistic world.

PAPER 5: 3 Cheers for Barbour

Thoko Kamwendo; Durham University

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I engage critically with the internal logic of Barbour’s fourfold typology of the relationship between science and religion, by putting it to an empirical test. Having performed a cluster analysis of survey data of UK Christian Church leaders, I argue that the typology is internally logical with one notable exception: the distinction between dialogue and integration. After giving a few reasons for why this might be, drawing on a number of commentators, I suggest ways to reimagine both the typology itself and its utility.

PAPER 6: Science Education and Worldview Formation: A Big Bang Case Study

Martin Sahlén; Uppsala University

ABSTRACT: Public education is tasked with conveying a scientific worldview, or at least to describe the world as seen through the lens of scientific knowledge. A narrow



interpretation is that a scientific worldview implies a worldview which is exhaustively defined by scientific knowledge and its objects of study. However, any realistic worldview arguably goes beyond this. Rather, it will also be based on e.g. philosophical commitments, cultural traditions, and personal experiences.

A scientific worldview, therefore, should rather be a matter of holding a scientifically informed worldview which otherwise may include a variety of philosophical positions. Should public education strive to convey worldviews which are both scientifically and philosophically well-informed? Which worldviews are conveyed explicitly or implicitly and public education? Are they scientific? Are they philosophically sound? What are the implications?

As a case study in science education, I will review how the Big Bang model is presented in Swedish school syllabi and text books, and to what extent the material is scientifically accurate and philosophically sound. I will argue that a common feature is the suggestion that our scientific knowledge provides us with a naturalistic explanation for how and why the Universe came into existence. Such an existential "rooting" of naturalism, however, suffers from three major problems: 1) a misunderstanding of what the Big Bang model is; 2) a misunderstanding of what the state of scientific knowledge is; 3) a philosophically uninformed explanatory overreach.

I conclude that a deeper understanding of the nature and basis of worldviews — worldview literacy — and their relation to "a scientific worldview" seems to be called for in education.

PAPER 7: Vedic astronomy during Colonial Bengal – A Case Study

Tinni Goswami; St Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

ABSTRACT: During the colonial period, the English-educated Bengali middle-class intelligentsia recognized the need to reform the Gaudiya Vaishnava community from the moral degradation and corruption that had become prominent after the Caitanya age. To achieve this, the Vaishnava periodicals played a significant role in creating awareness among the devotees and initiating a print culture of 'Piety' (Dey, 2020). These publications not only helped their readers develop an understanding of the true essence of the religion, but also convinced them that it was the greatest and most righteous option for people.

Gaudiya Vaisnavism's universal acceptance was not solely based on its scriptural finesse, but was also a product of its rational nature, where scientific observations were used to justify the religiosity of the community. Two periodicals on Hindu Astronomy (Jyotirbid and Brihaspati) by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur played a significant role in making Gaudiya Vaishnavism more popular amongst the educated Bengali middle-class devotees due to its realism. Even the celebration of Vaishnava festivals was decided on the basis of astronomical calculations mentioned in these journals, along with the birth and death anniversaries of famous Vaishnava gurus (Dey, 2020).

This paper aims to revisit the history of Vedic or Hindu astronomy through the lenses of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal. Here we need to highlight the life and works of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, the founder of the Gaudiya Math and Mission, who established the 'Saraswat Chatuspathi' in colonial Calcutta in 1897 to promote Hindu astronomy. Perhaps no other religion in the colonial period had taken such a stance to prove its worth not only in the light of spiritual doctrines but also from the perspectives of scientific humanism. His expertise in science played an important role in mobilizing Gaudiya Vaishnavism amongst the Bhadrakal community of modern Bengal, thus creating a niche for scientific nationalism and religious revival.

PAPER 8: Three Jewish Thinkers on the Religious Significance of the Size of the Universe

Berel Dov Lerner; Western Galilee College, Israel

ABSTRACT: Religious believers have been concerned by how estimates of the size of the universe have increased over the centuries. Fundamentalist readers of scripture may worry that the enormous universe of modern cosmology contradicts the literal meaning of



some biblical passages. More generally, the bible's anthropocentrism seems to require that intelligent life be unique to planet earth, making a cosmos populated by a stupendous number of uninhabited planets seem pointless and irrational (the so-called "Argument from Scale," see Mulgan 2015, Vainio 2018, Mokhtari 2021). In this paper I will compare the different religious attitudes towards the enormous size of the universe forwarded by three Jewish thinkers. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, the great Jewish philosopher and legal scholar Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) works with the Aristotelean cosmology favored in his day. He is happy with the universe being large, because that helps him downplay the relative significance of human suffering for the problem of evil. David Friesenhausen (1756–1828) a later and much less significant figure, gladly accepted the newly enlarged Copernican universe in his (1820) *Mosdot Tevel*, arguing that since the entire cosmos was created for the sake of Israel and its Torah, the larger the universe the greater the role of Israel and its Torah (see Brown 2013). Finally, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, explains that God deliberately planned for the great size of the universe to be gradually discovered by humanity to give them time to come to understand the spiritual insignificance of physical size (Kook 1986).

PAPER 9: Navigating Islamic Beliefs and Modern Science: Perspectives from University Educated Algerians

Khaled Meghne; University of Helsinki

ABSTRACT: My doctoral research examines how university-educated Algerians conceptualize the relationship between science and religion. While previous studies have primarily analyzed Muslim scholarly discourses on modern science, individual perspectives remain understudied and are often suspected to be shaped by pseudoscientific narratives and religious polemics. This study applies the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) framework, particularly the concept of explanatory coexistence, to explore how individuals integrate religious and scientific explanations. It also investigates the role of social learning in shaping these views (Legare et al., 2012; Shtulman, 2016; Haimila, 2023). Using a mixed-methods approach, the project begins with qualitative interviews examining participants' perspectives on science, religion, and topics like evolution and miracles. Initial findings suggest that most participants, regardless of religiosity, combine naturalistic and supernatural explanations. These insights will inform a larger survey and expand CSR's empirical foundation in Muslim-majority contexts, offering a nuanced perspective on belief and knowledge.

PAPER 10: WITHDRAWN

PAPER 11: Moderating the MetaHistorical Fall: Recent Eastern Orthodox Theodicies of Evolution

Travis Dumsday; Concordia University of Edmonton

ABSTRACT: Christian theologians have long wrestled with the question of the compatibility of the evolutionary process with theism, given that that process seems to entail a great deal of suffering and death on the part of non-human animals. Would a good God truly opt to work through such a process? Partly in response to this problem, and drawing on eastern patristic sources, a number of recent Orthodox thinkers (e.g., David Bentley Hart, Andrew Jackson, Alexander Khramov, Christopher Knight, etc.) have been exploring approaches to evolution involving what is sometimes called a 'meta-historical fall.' This is the notion that biological evolution (or at least certain negative aspects thereof) were not part of God's original intention for the creative process. Instead, evolution was a consequence of a fall (whether of angels or humans or both) which occurred in a state or realm outside of ordinary physical time. After providing a concise overview of the versions of this account currently on offer in the literature (along the way highlighting some differences among them), I proceed to assess them with respect both to their philosophical merits and their theological orthodoxy.



PAPER 12: AI as the Third Epistemology: Reimagining Science and Religion Beyond Human Cognition

Damian Mingle; Switchpoint Ventures

ABSTRACT: The historical dialogue between science and religion has been shaped by a fundamental assumption: that knowledge is exclusively human-centered, whether derived from empirical investigation or divine revelation. This assumption underpins both scientific rationalism and theological metaphysics, positioning human cognition as the sole bridge between the material and the transcendent. However, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces a radical epistemic rupture, one that compels us to revisit and reimagine the very nature of knowledge. AI does not merely extend human cognition; it generates truths that are neither empirical nor revelatory but fundamentally post-human. This paper argues that AI constitutes a third epistemology—a mode of knowledge neither reducible to the scientific method nor theological insight. Machine learning models uncover patterns, structures, and predictions that surpass human perception, operating within ontological and epistemic frameworks that do not conform to traditional categories of knowledge acquisition. This challenges the anthropocentric underpinnings of Western Enlightenment epistemology, but also raises profound questions for religious traditions, particularly those that emphasize non-discursive, mystical, or revealed knowledge. Drawing on Eastern Orthodox apophatic theology, Islamic falsafa, Advaita Vedanta non-dualism, and Indigenous cosmologies, this paper examines how non-Western traditions have long conceived of knowledge as something beyond rational cognition. AI's capacity to model reality in ways inaccessible to human experience echoes these mystical and non-dual insights, yet it also disrupts their theological foundations. If AI can generate meaningful, autonomous knowledge, does this suggest a form of non-human gnosis, or does it merely reaffirm the materialist reductionism that speculative realists such as Meillassoux critique? Can AI's alien intelligence be understood through Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, where AI operates as a withdrawn entity, generating knowledge inaccessible to human phenomenology? Furthermore, AI raises urgent questions regarding epistemic colonialism. The science-religion debate has historically privileged Eurocentric categories of knowledge, often marginalizing Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies. Does AI provide an opportunity to decolonize knowledge by uncovering epistemic structures that transcend human cultural limitations, or does it merely amplify Western techno-scientific dominance under a new guise?

By engaging with philosophy of mind, speculative realism, and comparative theology, this paper challenges the assumption that knowledge must be fundamentally human. If AI now surpasses human intuition in making sense of complex realities, then science and religion must confront an urgent philosophical question: do humans remain the primary interpreters of existence, or has AI become a speculative philosopher in its own right? This paper argues that the future of science-religion discourse must move beyond anthropocentric epistemology, recognizing AI as a new ontological agent that disrupts both the empirical and the theological. AI's knowledge is neither that of the scientist nor the theologian—but something radically other, demanding a reconfiguration of what it means to know, to perceive, and to speculate in the age of artificial cognition.

PAPER 13: Reason, Revelation, and Evolution: the Encounter of Islamic Thought with Modern Science in Colonial India

Ayesha Qurratulain; FRIAS

ABSTRACT: British colonialism in India extended beyond political and economic control; it encompassed a colonization of knowledge, resonating with Kuhn's concept of paradigm shift where a dominant system of thought supplants existing ones. This paper explores this epistemic clash between the British colonial episteme and the indigenous Indian Muslim episteme during the modern era, utilizing Foucault's notion of episteme as a conceptual grid shaping knowledge production and interpretation. The introduction of Western scientific thought, particularly evolutionary theory, challenged traditional Islamic epistemologies rooted in religious texts and interpretations. Daryabadi's work becomes a



crucial case study to analyze how Muslim intellectuals navigated this intellectual encounter, representing an example of epistemic shift. Daryabadi's work becomes more significant when placed in the context of his strong ties with major Muslim institutions of his time i.e., Farangi Mahal, Nadwa, Deoband, and Aligarh. Methodologically, the study employs a close reading of Daryabadi's exegetical works as well his essays and lectures, analyzing his interpretations of Quranic verses related to creation and human origins within the historical context of colonial India. The analysis will focus on Daryabadi's use of reason and hermeneutical strategies to reconcile traditional Islamic narratives with modern scientific concepts. By examining Daryabadi's engagement with evolutionary thought, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the diverse responses within South Asian Muslim intellectual thought to the challenges posed by modern science and colonialism.

PAPER 14: Priming the Historiography of Science and Religion in Africa

Agana-Nsiire Agana; Independent

ABSTRACT: Christian theologians have long wrestled with the question of the compatibility of the evolutionary process with theism, given that that process seems to entail a great deal of suffering and death on the part of non-human animals. Would a good God truly opt to work through such a process? Partly in response to this problem, and drawing on eastern patristic sources, a number of recent Orthodox thinkers (e.g., David Bentley Hart, Andrew Jackson, Alexander Khramov, Christopher Knight, etc.) have been exploring approaches to evolution involving what is sometimes called a 'meta-historical fall.' This is the notion that biological evolution (or at least certain negative aspects thereof) were not part of God's original intention for the creative process. Instead, evolution was a consequence of a fall (whether of angels or humans or both) which occurred in a state or realm outside of ordinary physical time. After providing a concise overview of the versions of this account currently on offer in the literature (along the way highlighting some differences among them), I proceed to assess them with respect both to their philosophical merits and their theological orthodoxy.

PAPER 15: The Devil is all in your mind: reflexivity and the impact of the psychosocial sciences on Satanic scripture

Scott Ryan Maybell; University of Oxford, St John's College

ABSTRACT:

Background: The principle of reflexivity, the responsibility for scientists to take into account how one's research methods and publications have a causal impact on one's subjects and society at large, has become an increasingly important component of research ethics in psychology and the social sciences (Berkovich-Ohana et al., 2020; Power et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2020). One form of impact the sciences can have is on religious practices and theological beliefs, such as the hypothesis that Hipparchus' (190-120 BCE) discovery of the procession of the equinoxes impacted the "soteriology and cosmology" of the Pistis Sophia (Hodges, 1997; Lewis, 2013, p. 135). Reflexivity is especially important for psychology and the social sciences because of the way they shape human relationships, informing: business practices, government policy, and religious orthodoxy/praxy.

Aim: The goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of how psychological and social scientific publications have "trickled down" into Satanist scripture and other literature, giving shape to Satanist a/theology, demonology, and ritual practice. At the "reimagining" meta-level of our field, I argue that by attending to the causal relationships between scientific publications and religious thought, science-and-religion scholars can assist psychologists and social scientists at being more effectively reflexive by making explicit how their research activity has historically impacted religious communities.

Satanism has been chosen as a case study for two reasons: 1) contemporary Satanism did not begin to take shape until 1952 (Introvigne, 2016, p. 299), which means that the religion was developed after psychology and the social sciences had already become institutionalized, and 2) Satanism has been almost entirely ignored in our field, and would



likely be bundled with “fringe” religions with “odd practices” which Niels Henrik Gregersen has unfortunately dismissed for science-and-religion research (2014, p. 424). In the name of reimagining, this project is an attempt at addressing this lack by asking: to what extent did psychology and the social sciences impact the religious practices and concepts of post-1950 Satanism, and how can understanding such impacts inform how scientists might understand and implement the principle of reflexivity?

Method: The scope of this presentation will be limited to LaVeyan Satanism. A survey of Satanic texts written by LaVey and his circle will be completed to develop a list of references to psychosocial concepts in their work, as well as any information in these texts which might point to the genealogy of such references. Using the tidytext package in R (Silge & Robinson, 2016), a quantitative analysis will be completed to schematize the Satanic concepts and practices most associated with psychosocial scientific ideas. Some salient examples will be subject to a second analysis through readings of the psychologists and social scientists who developed these ideas, with an eye towards continuities and discontinuities between their work and LeVayan atheology. The explication of the transmission from science to religion will be addressed in the final segment, with some suggested guidelines for interested scientists who aim to better implement the principle of reflexivity.

PAPER 16: Rethinking Human Dignity in the Age of AI: Transhumanism, Posthumanism, and Theological Reflections in Antiqua et Nova

Carlos Piccone-Camere; Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

ABSTRACT: The Vatican’s Antiqua et Nova document (2025), issued by the Dicasteries for the Doctrine of the Faith and for Culture and Education, addresses the profound challenges that artificial intelligence (AI) presents to conventional understandings of human nature and identity. Among its central themes, the document explores divergent reactions to AI’s potential to alter human identity and capabilities. Some envision a future where these technological advancements could surpass human nature, potentially diminishing the very essence of the human person, while others embrace these transformations as a path toward human evolution. In this context, the document engages critically with the ideas of transhumanism and posthumanism, ideologies that advocate for either enhancing human capacities through technology or envisioning a future in which the human condition is radically transformed, or even transcended, by AI. This paper aims to analyze the theological implications of these ideologies as they relate to the Catholic Church’s understanding of human dignity and the nature of the person. Transhumanism, with its focus on the augmentation of human abilities through technological means (Nusbaum, 2011; Bostrom, 2014), challenges traditional Christian views of the human body and soul, while posthumanism proposes a future where humanity itself may become obsolete or evolve beyond its current state (Braidotti, 2013; Wylie, 2020). These ideas, explored in Antiqua et Nova, raise fundamental questions regarding the preservation of human dignity in the face of profound technological change. The Church’s cautious stance on AI, while acknowledging its potential benefits, also reflects deep concerns about the loss of the human person in an increasingly technocratic world. The paper will also consider how these debates relate to broader ethical concerns, such as the implications for marginalized communities, particularly indigenous or postcolonial groups, who may experience these technological shifts differently. It will explore whether AI, rather than uplifting humanity, could exacerbate inequalities or entrench power structures that already marginalize vulnerable populations. Finally, the paper will offer a forward-thinking theological perspective on AI, proposing ways in which the Church might guide the faithful and society in navigating the opportunities and challenges presented by AI technologies. It will advocate for an approach that safeguards human dignity while embracing technological advancements that promote human flourishing in an ethically responsible manner, ensuring that human beings remain at the center of any technological evolution.



PAPER 17: Religion and science in the view of Valentin VoynoYasenetsky An input to the discussion on the status and role of Christian Philosophy

Adam Świeżyński; Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

ABSTRACT: V. Voyno-Yasenetsky(1877-1961) is a person who joins the competencies of a scientist (in medicine) and a theologian (Orthodox). In his works, one can find two papers that directly address the issue of the relationship between scientific and theological cognition ('Science and Religion'; 'Spirit, Soul, Body'). The position that Voyno-Yasenetsky takes on the relationship between the scientific and theological image of the world is as follows:

- (1) neither science nor religion provides a complete and exhaustive image of the world;
- (2) because of their different cognitive and methodological planes, detailed science and theology answer various research questions;
- (3) the source of the belief that scientific and religious views conflict is the lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of the findings of both the detailed sciences and theology, as well as the lack of knowledge of philosophy, especially the theory of cognition;
- (4) the conflict between science and religion (specific sciences and theology) can only occur between the statements of researchers on both sides, not between scientific and theological facts;
- (5) in both scientific and theological cognition, there is an element of "faith," i.e., epistemic and practical trust;
- (6) to make meaningful statements about the relationship between science and religion, one must be a religious practitioner, i.e., have an experience of a religious nature ("communication with the Absolute")
- (7) one should strive for harmony between scientific and religious images of the world using an in-depth knowledge of both.

In the outlined position, the assertions in items (4), (5), and (6) seem to be particularly interesting (though at the same time debatable): (4), (5) I (6).

Moreover, Wojno-Jasieniecki's position may be considered as a starting point for a discussion on the status and tasks of the so-called Christian philosophy. In this context I would like to propose an understanding of Christian philosophy that treats it as a "bridge" between the sciences and theology (or more broadly: science and religion). This would mean that its task would be, broadly speaking, to strive for a comprehensive image of the world, taking into account the achievements of the sciences and the basic claims of Christian theology. This can also be regarded as one of the tasks of Christian philosophy as traditionally understood.

I base the above proposition on the following claims:

- (1) The results (findings) achieved in the sciences and in theology, as well as the hypotheses and theories posed on their basis, imply philosophical problems which make it possible, in turn, to establish the connections between these sciences and theology.
- (2) These connections are generally realized through the philosophically interpreted results of the sciences and theology.
- (3) Philosophy can thus play the role of a "medium" between the sciences and theology.
- (4) To call it "Christian" would only mean that its theological reference is Christian theology.

Christian philosophy understood in this way expresses, I believe, the "spirit" of traditional Christian philosophy, which has always oscillated between religious faith and its rational justification in the context of the current world image.

The speech will be focused on the presentation of Voyno-Yasenetsky and his position with my own conclusions.

PAPER 18: Suffering and Dying in Modern Pandemics: A Parallel Reading of I. Illich, G. Agamben and B. - C. Han

Kyriaki Grammnou; National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT: In Medical Nemesis Ivan Illich suggests that both the lived experience of suffering and dying as well as their symbolic functions have undergone radical changes due to Iatrogenesis, a term coined to indicate the colonization of medicine by experts. He



examines how dying has been transformed into a technical matter and argues that “through the medicalization of death, health care has become a monolithic world religion”. Almost fifty years later, in a series of texts published during the recent pandemic, Giorgio Agamben revisits Illich’s work. He argues that the first sign of the ethical collapse that the restriction measures taken have brought into light concerns the management of dead bodies. “How could we have accepted [...] that persons who are dear to us and human beings in general should not only die alone, but [...] that their cadavers should be burned without a funeral?”, he asks.

For Agamben, as far as the Church is the guardian of human morality, it has failed in its “duty to keep watch over human dignity”. Echoing Illich’s views, he argues that “in making itself the handmaid of science, which has now become the true religion of our time, [the Church] has radically repudiated its most essential principles”. He insists that, in order for medicine to assume the role of religion, it has “split the unity of our vital experience”, now fractured into two discrete spheres, namely spirituality and physicality – or bare life, as he calls it. Agamben meets Illich by acknowledging that the latter “demonstrated the responsibility of modern medicine in this split”. Around the same time when Agamben writes these texts, Byung-Chul Han publishes a book titled *The Palliative Society: Pain Today*. There, he suggests that today’s main ideology consists in algophobia and thanatophobia, which both function as indicators of a radical substitution: “Virology disempowers theology”, he writes.

However, unlike religion, medicine cannot provide the sufferer with a vision of deliverance since “the narrative of resurrection completely gives way to the ideology of health and survival”, therefore “death itself is no longer integrated into a meaningful narrative of salvation”. Similarly, Agamben ascertains that “the medical religion does not offer the prospect of salvation and redemption”. Illich, on the other hand, highlights the crucial substitution mentioned earlier, since “high-technology care and death can be understood as a deep-seated need for the engineering of miracles”.

This paper explores Ivan Illich, Giorgio Agamben and Byung-Chul Han’s work, seeking both convergent and divergent concepts of suffering and dying in the light of the recent pandemic. Its key points concern the transformation of social attitudes toward suffering and dying, pain and death’s new symbolic functions, and the substitution of techno-scientific miracles for salvation. While taking into account the emergence of transhumanism, it explores the hedonistic imperatives of happycracy and compares them with more traditional notions of spirituality.

PAPER 19: A Substance Dualistic Model of the Human Self

Roger Pullin; Society of Ordained Scientists

ABSTRACT: Across science the human self is regarded as entirely physical/physically-derived. Many who embrace both science and faith endorse substance monistic models of the human self, including dipolar monism/organizational pluralism, dual-aspect monism, emergentist monism, neutral monism and nonreductive physicalism. Material-spiritual substance dualism is widely rejected, despite professed beliefs in a spiritual realm, in God as a Spirit pursuing divine action for human benefit and in a spiritual force for evil pursuing diabolic action for human harm. Pullin (2014, 2017) proposed a substance dualistic model of the human self as an entirely physical/physically-derived body-mind, including all constituents and workings of the brain, allied with an entirely spiritual soul. The soul as such is always in the spiritual realm throughout the life of the body-mind and after its death. Body-mind and soul receive information from the material and spiritual realms, respectively, for mental reasoning and soul processing. The results can mix across the self’s mind-soul interface in some common format, possibly as quantum probability fields. Body-mind and soul respond in their respective realms, with further information exchanges and processing and further mixing. This uniquely human capacity, termed Free Thought, with capitals to elevate it above basic thought about pursuing biological needs, enables free-willed self-chosen decisions about the higher things of life, including morality, justice and creativity. A Free Thought episode begins with a question posed by God and/or the spiritual force for evil and/or the self about some aspect of the self’s current positions. The episode progresses through iterative cycles of uncertainty, multiple options and stepwise resolutions to a self-chosen outcome for the time being, which



drives the self's behavior pending further episodes. On this basis, divine and diabolic action take place only within individual human souls and have wider impacts only through human choices and behavior. The case for substance dualism in the human self is further developed here, with discussions on divine and diabolic action and possible implications for human relations and science.

PAPER 20: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Experience: Does Christian theology need psychology in studying pneumatology in the Book of Acts?

Ning Xu; University of Oxford

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I engage the respective works of Simeon Zahl (2022) and Tanya Luhrmann (2012, 2020) in a constructive dialogue to develop a psychology-engaged pneumatology (cf. Perry and Leidenhag, 2023). I situate this discussion within an analysis of the book of Acts. I argue that this triangular analysis of the three authors allows us to render pneumatology in an embodied, 'practically recognizable' mode amenable to further empirical study.

To argue my position, I first engage with the theological principles laid out by Zahl, which, in critiquing the rationalist tendencies of modern Protestant theology, emphasises the pneumatological character and importance of Christian experience in grounding theological theories, drawing particularly from affect theory to illuminate the doctrines of soteriology and sanctification (Zahl, 2022). I argue that Zahl's work offers itself as a natural and constructive interlocutor with Luhrmann's psychology-engaged anthropological studies of modern Christians' experiences of God (Luhrmann, 2012, 2014).

While Luhrmann's work has offered innovative and fruitful psychological insights into these experiences, it cannot, being situated within a fundamentally methodologically naturalistic framework, competently penetrate into the core of theological concerns by failing to operate within its assumptions, producing in turn an inadvertently reductionist naturalistic devoid of the depths of scriptural insights (cf. McGrath, 2001).

I argue that this weakness may be countered by grounding Luhrmann's psychology-engaged anthropology from within the larger Christian tradition, and specifically as undergirded by Zahl's experiential-pneumatological emphasis. In this way, I argue that we may begin to discover a creative and collaborative mode of examining pneumatology and use Acts 10 as a case study on how this methodology may generate more robust, concrete and embodied theological theories.

I conclude the paper by exploring how such a methodology can be seen as a kind of 'experimental theology' that is 'capable of generating empirically testable hypotheses' (Callaway and Strawn, 2019) in constructing psychology-engaged pneumatological studies. This kind of approach closes in on the gap between theological theories and concrete Christian experiences. In particular, I propose certain qualitative research methods for studying the Christian experiences of the Holy Spirit, especially those of missiological practices of charismatic and pentecostal ministries. Such studies would in turn bring new insights to the concrete, embodied and empirical dimensions of biblical documents such as the Book of Acts.

PAPER 21: A Phenomenology of the 'New Biology': a reimagination of the relationship between science and religion through embodiment.

Kieran Evans; University of Nottingham

ABSTRACT: The reported reductionist and objectivist accounts of science, in particular biology, often lead to a false diagnosis: ontological physicalism as the sole successful ontology. This paper problematises this, arguing that proponents of ontological physicalism to stretch the naturalist methodology to extremity. Rather, upon investigation,



the processual nature of biological 'concepts' emerges – something that forces a paradigm shift to incorporate the two-way street of reciprocal causation, for example niche construction. This scientific shift prompts an equal epistemological upheaval – a questioning of the primacy of scientific knowledge – and a reimagination of the relationship between religion and the new phenomenological biology.

This paper takes a phenomenological approach to biology's concepts, utilising the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. One concept scrutinised is the 'organism;' upon investigation, it emerges that to faithfully represent the organism, it must be taken as a whole, encompassing its body, temporality, and context. Instead of describing an organism in terms of its matter, it becomes more appropriate to describe it through its acts. Ultimately, the resulting biological description of an organism, and its reciprocal influence within its milieu, parallels the phenomenological project: a narrative of "'lived' space, 'lived' time, and the 'lived' world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxx).

The biologist's inherent participation in these living systems renders "what we call life is already consciousness of life;" a preconception stemming from their lived embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 184). This paper shows that existence installs a latent ontology of life into the work of the biologist. The rooting of concepts within life, exposing their cyclical nature, opens the conceptual pathway as two-way; concepts emerge from the subject to the object, and from the object to the subject. Therefore, prior to the biologist's serialisation, life is structured into manifestation, circumscribing a particular form. As a result, any projection of the first-person account of empirical investigation into the third, loses causation itself.

Life precedes the biological concept, placing itself into primacy. This paper will explore how Merleau-Ponty's ontology of Being interprets this embodiment, centralising the body, and coalescing habits and sedimentations. As with the biological 'concept,' our relationship with the world is two-way, existing in a communion. Therefore, I argue that the biologist is prejudiced by their embodiment. Out of this framework, we can no longer consider science "the exercise of a pure and unsituated intellect... free of all human traces" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 44-5). Resulting from this rooting of the biologist-in-the-world, the project of unsituated naturalism is revealed as a misnomer; rather, we can see that biology's concept is painted in experience, embodiment, and life itself. Consequently, the narrative of scientific objectivism versus the superstition of religion must be revisited. It is in this way that this paper acts as a call to reimagine this false dichotomy between science and religion; they are both situated within the same predicament – embodiment.



New Voices in Science and Religion

For the first time this year speakers were able to choose to submit a New Voices paper, in addition Highly Commended submissions to the Peacocke Student Essay Prize were invited to present. All our New Voices Authors are invited to submit their full paper for publication in *Reviews* so keep your eyes peeled!

NEW VOICES 1: Does Cognitive Power Create a Person? Analysing the Catholic Approaches to personhood in Dementia

Aidan Kennedy; University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT: Introduction: Dementia affects many people worldwide and poses difficult questions when considering personhood. How should this be assessed in a hospital environment?

Discussion: In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus implies that the essential characteristic in identifying an individual as a person is their positive actions within the community. If one loves God and does good with those around them, this qualifies a person. In a medical setting, I argue that this approach is entirely inappropriate and may lead to inappropriate stigmatisation of dementia.

In defining personhood through God's love, everyone should be identified as possessing personhood until we learn otherwise. Simply having a human body and being alive qualifies someone as a person. I find this approach overly simplistic and to undermine the principle of personhood. Additionally, this does not align with my lived experiences in the clinical environment where physicians aim to support 'disabilities'.

Finally, Boethius' definition sets out three clear criteria for being a person. These criteria could be evaluated by medical professionals, however may introduce bias into who is considered a person.

Conclusion: Overall, Boethius' definition of a person is the most appropriate in an acute setting, however it also has its shortcomings.

NEW VOICES 2: In Defence of Natural Philosophy, or The Compatibility Between Science and Theism

Raphael Mees; University of Porto

ABSTRACT: The conflict between science and religion has been a perennial issue in philosophy (since the 17th century). This paper examines the relationship between science and theism, considering the possibilities of compatibilism, incompatibilism, and independence. I argue that the independence thesis, which holds that science and religion address entirely separate domains, is incoherent. Instead, I propose that compatibilism offers the most coherent approach, the one that aligns most with human experience and intellectual integrity.

The independence thesis often relies on the distinction between methodological and ontological naturalism. Methodological naturalism assumes naturalism for the purposes of empirical investigation. Ontological naturalism, however, extends this method into a metaphysical claim: only the natural exists. I argue that this distinction is untenable because methodological naturalism presupposes metaphysical commitments, aligning it implicitly with ontological naturalism.

Building on R.G. Collingwood's definition of metaphysics as the science of absolute presuppositions, I show that every scientific discipline relies on foundational metaphysical assumptions. Physics, for example, presupposes concepts such as causation, existence, and essence, which cannot be explained within physics. By rejecting metaphysics, one assumes radical skepticism and metaphysical nihilism, which contradicts our experience of the world.

Following J. Milbank and D.C. Schindler, I argue that modern science, whose paradigmatic virtue is doubt, should return to natural philosophy, which integrates metaphysical truths into scientific inquiry, centralizing faith instead. Assuming the supernatural helps us delineate nature. A hierarchical and purposeful cosmos makes more justice to how we study nature and live in it.



NEW VOICES 3: Josef Pieper on Scientism: A Novel Contribution

Rashad Rehman; Franciscan University of Steubenville

ABSTRACT: In his small, often-neglected book *In Defense of Philosophy*, German philosopher Josef Pieper offers a timeless, ingenious approach to the relationship between religion and science. While Pieper follows a venerable tradition that regards scientism, the epistemological thesis that science is the only source of knowledge, as self-referentially incoherent, he offers a proactive argument against scientism which not only includes a justification of philosophy, but also the possibility of justified religious belief. His argument is as follows. Following philosopher A. N. Whitehead, Pieper says that the philosophical question is as follows: "What is it all about?" In distinction to science which asks questions of aspect, to engage in philosophy is to reflect on the totality of things we encounter in view of their ultimate reasons. This has two natural corollaries. The first is an epistemic principle that our knowing practices require that all human experience serve as the datum from which we adjudicate truth from falsehood. The second is an axiological principle that our ontological inventory of what there is ought to reflect openness to the totality of reality. The conjunction of these principles yields a vision of science as a constitutive feature of the human person's quest for knowledge, but which is limited by virtue of being one part of human experience. I argue that this yields a plausible conception of the relationship between science and religion: religion, similar to philosophy, concerns itself not with intangible questions, but questions about the things before our very eyes, but with recourse to metaphysical ultimacy - and takes seriously religious claims for their truth-value. Pieper's position has theoretical advantages beyond being anti-scientistic: it also directly indicts religions and religious practices which cannot accommodate epistemic openness, a constitutive feature of which is a healthy vision of scientific knowledge. In a word: science without openness to religion is proportionately mistaken to religion without openness to science.

NEW VOICES 4: Where Neuroscience and Biblical Exegesis Meet: Romans 7:15 and the anterior midcingulate cortex

Marnix t'Hart; University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT: This essay explores how neuroscientific research can inform biblical exegesis, focusing on the anterior mid-cingulate cortex (aMCC) and its potential relevance to the internal conflict described in Romans 7:15: "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." The aMCC, associated with persistence and overcoming challenges, is activated when individuals engage in behaviors they wish to avoid. The essay connects neuroscientific research on the aMCC to the longstanding debate on whether Romans 7:15 reflects a pre-Christian or Christian experience. While it is difficult to understand the aMCC as a brain localization of the religious experience described by Paul, the essay argues that aMCC research complements the Christian interpretation and complicates the pre-Christian interpretation. This suggests that Romans 7:15 reflects a believer's ongoing struggle with sin in the process of sanctification. Neuroscientific research enriches the theological debate by highlighting the connection between willpower, sin, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. This essay is a specific example of how the relationship between science and religion can be reimagined.



NEW VOICES 5: The theistic implications in the work of Sir James Jeans

Sam McKee; Manchester Metropolitan University

ABSTRACT: Sir James Jeans, an astronomer of note in the early twentieth century is overlooked and understudied regarding his popularity and high sales in his science communication work during the interwar period. Given his importance in the early development of both astrophysics and philosophy of science as academic disciplines, he has been overshadowed by others from Einstein's generation. Here I argue that one reason may be his more vague theistic implications in his philosophical writing. Challenged vigorously by Bertrand Russell, Susan Stebbing and others, it is unclear whether he holds a Christian faith whilst seeming to argue for a mathematical God behind the universe. I present an exploration of his case and argue for the theistic implications of his most important work.

NEW VOICES 6: Zen Buddhism and Science: Reimagining the Relationship Beyond Conflict Theory from a Chinese Perspective

Ge Lei; University College London

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the relationship between Zen Buddhism(禪宗佛教) and science from the perspective of Chinese traditions, offering a counterexample to the "Conflict Theory." Conflict Theory, rooted in the historical tension between science and religion, posits that the two are inherently irreconcilable: religion constructs transcendent divinity to endow humanity with meaning, while science demystifies natural laws through rational inquiry. However, Zen Buddhism, rooted in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism (大乘佛教), challenges this dichotomy. It emphasizes inner awakening and practice, neither relying on external divinity nor rejecting rational exploration. Instead, it reveals the unity of humans and the universe through "seeing one's true nature" (明心見性, mingxin jianxing), resonating with modern scientific concepts such as holism, complexity theory, and consciousness studies.

This paper argues that Zen Buddhism and science share common ground while also offering mutual critique. First, Zen teachings such as "the mind itself is Buddha" (即心是佛, jixin shifo) emphasize subjective agency, realized through practices like kanhua meditation (參話頭, canhuatou), which investigates paradoxical questions to transcend dualistic thinking. This aligns with the scientific spirit of inquiry, as both seek deeper truths through disciplined investigation. Similarly, the Zen principle of "no-thought as the essence" (無念為宗, wunian weizong) advocates transcending dualistic oppositions, recognizing reality through intuitive wisdom, echoing the holistic thinking in science. The Diamond Sutra(《金剛經》), with its teaching that "all phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows," further underscores Zen's non-attachment to fixed concepts, paralleling the provisional nature of scientific theories.

Second, Zen Buddhism critiques the limitations of science. While science has brought progress, it has also led to challenges such as instrumental rationality, environmental degradation, and the alienation of human relationships. Zen's emphasis on compassion and interconnectedness offers a corrective. For example, the ideal of "compassion for all beings" (慈悲為懷, cimei wei huai) critiques the reductionist tendencies of modern science, which often treats nature as a resource rather than a living system. Zen's holistic approach also challenges the fragmentation of knowledge in modern science, advocating for a more integrated understanding of the world.

By drawing on classical Zen texts such as The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (《六祖壇經》), The Blue Cliff Record (《碧巖錄》), and The Diamond Sutra (《金剛經》), this paper demonstrates how Zen Buddhism provides a framework for reimagining the science-religion relationship. It proposes that the integration of Zen and science can transcend traditional dichotomies, leading to a new paradigm where humanity rationally understands the world while embracing universal compassion and wisdom. In this paradigm, humans no longer rely on external divine authority but achieve unity with the universe through inner awakening and practice, while treating nature and society with selfless care and responsibility.



NEW VOICES 7 (Not being presented): Entropy and the Concept of God

Annabelle Minnis

ABSTRACT: The following essay explores the perceived conflict between the physical reality of entropy, observable and measurable within the universe, and the concept of an omnibenevolent and omnipotent divine creator. Drawing upon scholars such as Clausius, Penrose, Polkinghorne and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, I will explore whether a universe with a natural predisposition towards chaos can align with the God of Classical Theism. Moreover, I will address theological disputes such as the Problem of Evil and the relationship between chaos and suffering with the responses of Irenaeus, Augustine and Plantinga. I will argue that while entropy in the physical realm suggests decay, Christian theology posits a transcendence through spiritual growth and divine reunion, which ultimately contextualises the earthly condition.



About SRF

The Science and Religion Forum (SRF) had its inception in a series of discussions involving scientists, theologians and clergy which took place in Oxford in the early 1970s. The key figure in the early discussions was Arthur Peacocke who was to become the Forum's first Chairman, and later a Vice President and then President.

Today, SRF exists to promote discussion between scientific understanding and religious thought on issues at the interface of science and religion, and membership is open to people of any religion or none.

History of the Forum

In 1972, informal consultations began in Oxford between a group of scientists, theologians, and clergy who were concerned to relate their scientific knowledge and methods of study to their religious faith and practice. This group, gradually increasing in size, met annually.

It was decided at a meeting in Durham, in 1975, to inaugurate the SCIENCE AND RELIGION FORUM to enable further discussion of the complex issues that arise at the interaction between scientific understanding and religious thought. Such issues need close attention and continuing re-assessment. Together with the social and ethical decisions demanded by scientific and technological advances, these issues have formed the subject of the Forum's meetings since that date.

The Forum received charitable status in 1994. In 2005 the Science and Religion Forum merged with the Christ and the Cosmos Initiative. (The latter had been founded by the Revd Bill Gowland, a past President of the Methodist Conference, with the intention of bringing the latest knowledge of scientific thinking within the orbit of the enquiring layperson.

Membership

Science and Religion Forum a UK charity and membership organisation that is dedicated to promoting the discussion between scientific understanding and religious thought on issues at the interface of science, religion, and society. We are open to members of all faiths and none, and our conferences and student essay prize are open to all.

We have been working hard to diversify and broaden our membership, so that it is more reflective of those engaging with questions of science (including social sciences) and all religions. We have competitive membership rates. If you are interested in becoming a member of the follow the link below. Or to be added to our mailing list email srforum.membership@gmail.com.

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