

WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



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January 28, 2013

Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

We at WesleyNexus hope the New Year has greeted you with hope and promise. We look forward to connecting with our participants on programs, resources and other issues throughout the coming year. Below you will find a number of items we wish to draw to your attentions.

Nobel Prize Winner in Physics to Participate in Evolution Weekend Panel

Dr. John Mather, Nobel Prize in physics, 2006 will be participating in a panel discussion with **Dr. Connie Bertka** (Co-chair of the Smithsonian Human Origins Project), **Rabbi George Driesen** (Founder and President of the Institute for Science and Judaism), and **Thomas Burnett** (recently part of the BioLogos Foundaton team and now with the National Academy of Sciences). The panel discussion will provide expert commentary following the live webcast of “**Evolving Universe, Evolving Faith**” a production of [Darkwood Brew](#) online Christian ministry (Omaha, NE) in celebration of [Evolution Weekend](#).

All are invited! This event will be held on **Sunday Evening, February 10, 2013, 5:30pm to 8:30 pm at the Baltimore-Washington Conference United Methodist Church Mission Center** (11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD). Come listen and participate in this multimedia interfaith event! Enjoy fellowship and discussion with others interested in the mysteries, magnificence, and process of creation, and in the challenges and opportunities at the intersection of religion and science. The live webcast will be shown on two large projection screens and our expert panel discussion with audience participation will follow the webcast. Ample free parking is available at the Conference Center. WesleyNexus is happy to be a sponsor of this Maryland program.

For those who are not able to be in Maryland for the program, the live webcast with **Dr. Grace Wolf-Chase**, Astrophysicist with the Adler Planetarium in Chicago and Sr. Research Associate with the Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics, University of Chicago and **Rev. Bruce Booher**, ordained pastor with Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and a member of the Lutheran Alliance for Faith, Science and Technology, can be accessed via the web at the Darkwood Brew website. Darkwood Brew’s **Dr. Eric Elnes** will be the online host of the event which begins at 6:00 EST on February 10th.

The flyer of the event can be found [here](#). Please post it and share with those whom you think will be enriched by this event. If you have any questions, please check the Maryland website at [www.EvolutionWeekendMD.com](#) or send an email to EvolutionWeekendMD@gmail.com. You can also reach WesleyNexus, Inc. via email at WesleyNexus@aol.com.

Towards

Renowned sociologist **Peter Berger** will present a lecture arguing that secularization theory—the idea that modernity necessarily leads to a decline of religion—has been falsified. Instead of our time being an age of secularity, ours is an age of pluralism. Our problem is not that belief in God is no more but that ours is a time of belief in many gods and that “there are too many of them around.”

Berger will present an outline of a theory of pluralism for the modern era on **February 5, 2013** at the **Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs of Georgetown University** at 12 pm. RSVP is required and can be accessed on the event web page [here](#).

Myth of Universal Love

On January 5th, **Stephen Asma** wrote a provocative thought piece for the **NY Times Stone Forum** where he questions the viability of universal love as a moral principle for which we should all strive. As he puts it, “in the light of the new year, it’s worth considering how far we actually can, or should, extend this good will.” In answering this proposal, Asma states that he is not a proponent of universal love. As a self-described secularist, he views the problem from an evolutionary perspective. “Empathy is actually a biological emotion (centered in the limbic brain) that comes in degrees, because it has a specific physiological chemical progression. Empathy is not a concept, but a natural biological event—an activity, a process”. A person who stands squarely within the Wesleyan tradition of loving one’s neighbor will find this article a challenge, both for the faith itself and the dialog of faith with science. As such, it provides a stimulus for critical thought. The article can be found [here](#).

Reviews of Tom Nagel’s Mind and Cosmos

Tom Nagel is University Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University and a distinguished critic of reductive materialism which states that everything can be understood by understanding chemistry and biology. In Tom Nagel’s recent book, [Mind and Cosmos](#), Nagel lays out in a short, crisp fashion his criticism of “materialistic naturalism”. Not surprisingly, his book has stimulated quite a response.

In October, Brian Leiter and Michael Weisberg published an article, “[Do You Only Have a Brain? On Thomas Nagel](#)”, in *The Nation*, deeply critical of his position. Then in January in *The New York Review of Books*, H. Allen Orr, in a tone a little less strident but no less critical, challenges Nagel’s naturalistic teleology. In “[Awaiting a New Darwin](#)”, Orr, though admitting that one cannot rule out the possibility of teleology in nature, asserts that the real question “is not whether teleology is formally compatible with the practice of science. The question is whether the practice of science leads to taking teleology seriously.” Since, for Orr, the scientific evidence for teleology does not exist, there is no reason for taking it seriously now. To do so will require a radical change.

For many in the science and religion dialog, however, Orr’s assertion is old hat. Science is methodologically ill-suited to uncover intimations of purpose. **John Haught, Philip Clayton, Michael Ruse, John Cobb** and **John Polkinghorne**, to name just a few, have presented cogent arguments for teleology within an evolutionary framework. But the conversation will continue with Nagel’s book being the most recent catalyst.

Profiles In (Evolutionary) Courage

Over the last few years, Michael Zimmerman, founder of the [Clergy Letter Project](#) (and also a

member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board) has highlighted individuals who have responded to intimidations against the teaching of biological evolution by standing up and being heard. The stories of [Denise](#), [Al](#), [Ron and other clergy](#), and [Zack](#) provide evidence of how difficult it is in some communities to stand up for the teaching of solid science.

Please let us hear from you as you continue your search for meaning and discover articles and books, webcasts and upcoming programs that we can share with others.

God Bless,
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