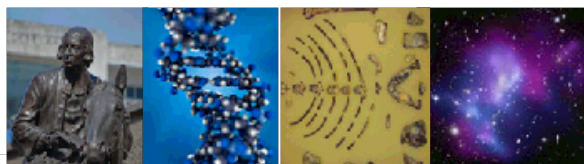


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition

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March 22, 2015

Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

From its inception, WesleyNexus has deliberately aimed at having an expansive vision of the science and religion dialog. We not only encourage engagement with the hard sciences (physics, chemistry and biology) but also human sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.), philosophy, and theological reflection from a variety of traditions. This month, our identified resources and events cover a wide swatch of disciplines and perspectives. Perhaps the best way to bring some order to this collection is not to say that there is a theme between the articles but to ask how we might gain insight from each article or event to our understanding of God's relationship to the world, how that relationship enriches our understanding of ourselves, and how we can apply that understanding to our personal lives, our lives as members of faith communities and our lives as members of the global family of humans and other life forms. I suspect that the references below will generate a good bit of disagreement as well as agreement. At WesleyNexus, we do not expect conformity of thought but hope that the resources and events presented each month will energize your thinking, spur you into dialog with others and enrich your spiritual reflection.

We continue to ask for your support. WesleyNexus is very much a virtual organization. I write this on my home computer using free email and incurring no organizational expense. All funds that we collect are spent on maintaining our web presence, sponsoring programs, distributing the newsletter and promoting activities of other organizations within the science and religion space.

All contributions are acknowledged for tax reporting purposes. Please consider supporting us with a contribution either through the PayPal DONATE link below, or, by sending a check to:

WesleyNexus, Inc.
24500 Fossen Road
Damascus, MD 20872



Thanks in advance for your support.

God Bless,

Rick Barr, Secretary,
WesleyNexus, Board of Directors

Reminder: Early Adversity and Later-Life Illness: March 29, 2015 @ 7:00 p.m., The Institute for Science and Judaism & Temple Beth Ami

Two researchers, Dr. David Reiss and Dr. Stephen Suomi will discuss their collaboration, which has the

ultimate goal of developing both childhood and adult forms of therapies for prevention and reversal of the lie from early adversity. The event page with flyer for the



The Institute for Science and Judaism
ScienceAndJudaism.org

GreenFaith Day 2015: April 25, 2015

On April 25, 2015, the Community UMC in Crofton, MD will be hosting a “Bring a Scientist to Services at Your House of Worship” event. Bring a Scientist to Services at Your House of Worship is a project sponsored by GreenFaith, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership”. When available, more information will be posted about this on www.wesnex.org. You can find more information about GreenFaith at www.GreenFaith.org.



Hall of Human Origins Hits the Road

The Smithsonian and the American Library Association (ALA) have developed a new traveling exhibition on human evolution based on the iconic “David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins” at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. “Exploring Human Origins: What Does It Mean to Be Human?” will appear at 19 public libraries across the country between April 2015 and April 2017. Information on this program can be found [here](#).



Wesleyan Theological Society Golden Anniversary Annual Meeting

The WTS 2015 Annual meeting, its 50th, was an intellectual milestone as well as a celebration to be long remembered by more than 300 members and friends, representing over 30 institutions and churches, including some from Australia and Korea. Meeting in weather that barely reached 2 degrees Fahrenheit on several days at Mount Vernon Nazarene University in Ohio on March 6-7, the conference theme was “The Past and Future of Wesleyan/Holiness Identity.” The numbers included over 75 graduate students attending their first meeting, an excellent sign for the future. WTS President Dick Thompson, New Testament scholar from Northwest Nazarene University, planned the event, led an excellent program, and delivered a stimulating Presidential address “Holy Word, Holy People: (re)Placing Scripture in Wesleyan-Holiness Thought and Practice.” Other plenary speakers, Dr. Doug Strong, Dean of the School of Theology at Seattle Pacific University, and Dr. Beth Felker Jones, professor of systematic theology at Wheaton College, provided additional leadership that everyone appreciated – their presentations will appear in the 2016 Spring WTS Journal. The Society achievement awards were given to Dr. David Bundy (Lifetime Achievement Award), Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison (Smith-Wynkoop Book Award), and Dr. Henry Spaulding (Pastor/Scholar/Preacher Award). Everyone in attendance was given a copy of the newly published history of the Society, Wesleyan Theological Society: The 50th Anniversary Celebration Volume, edited by Barry Callen and Steven Hoskins, and a 50th Anniversary souvenir magazine with photos and archived documents from our past. At the annual business meeting, Priscilla Pope-Levison was elected Second Vice-President, Jennifer Woodruff-Tait was elected to the Editorial Board of the Wesleyan Theological Journal, and Patrick Eby was elected to the Program Committee. As usual the Wesleyan Philosophical Society held its annual meeting in conjunction at Mount Vernon, and the Wesleyan Historical



Society held its organizational meeting during the conference, with others now being planned annually. During the two day meeting, more than 70 academic papers were presented at some 31 discussion sessions, including one in the Science and Theology track presented by Dr. E. Maynard Moore, WesleyNexus President, entitled “John Wesley's Engagement with the 'Science' of His Day.” A version of this paper will be submitted for publication in the WTS Journal. WesleyNexus Advisory Board member Dr. Thomas Oord of Northwest Nazarene University made several excellent Conference presentations and coordinated all sessions in the Science and Theology track. The WTS 51st meeting is scheduled next year at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, CA, March 11-12, 2016. Incoming President Doug Koskela, Seattle Pacific University, is planning an excellent program. Our theme for the 2016 Meeting is "The New Birth" and Dr. Oliver Davies, Kings College, London, will be the plenary speaker. The conference advertising poster and call for papers will soon be posted on the WTS website. The 2017 conference, scheduled for Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, is being planned right now by First Vice President Dr. Scott Kisker of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. Many thanks go to Steve Hoskins and Brent Peterson for their leadership and coordination of all WTS affairs on a continuing basis. As always, direct questions about the Society (or for special assistance not on the website) contact either at shoskins@trevecca.edu or Brent Peterson, WTS Secretary-Treasurer, at bdpeterson@nnu.edu.

Thanks to Dr. Steve Hoskins at Trevecca Nazarene University for most of the summary material in this article.

DoSER Program of AAAS:



“Perceptions: Science and Religious Communities”

A National Conference sponsored by the DoSER program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

On Friday March 13th at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. leaders from the science and religious communities gathered for the culmination of a three-year project sponsored by the Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion (DoSER) program. Two of our WesleyNexus Board members, Dr. Maynard Moore and Rev Angela Maves attended the event.

Many attendees previously had participated in the community-based workshops around the country that brought together local scientists and religious leaders to build relationships and investigate the perceptions that scientists and religious communities (particularly Evangelical Christians) have about each other. This was a day of dialogue to foster new relationships and a new vision for discussing science, its ethical framework, and its benefits for all people.

The Rev. Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, spoke on “Why Science Matters” and his organization gave us all copies of their new publication: “When God and Science Meet: Surprising Discoveries of Agreement.”

Elaine Ecklund, Director of the Religion and Public Life program at Rice University shared some findings from their nationwide “Perceptions” survey. They found that religious Americans can be engaged in science, especially science that alleviates human suffering. They also found that most religious Americans do not view science as the enemy, and that religious people are already working in the field of science and could be key bridge builders between the two communities. Some tensions were found with the Evangelical Christians: 60% of whom agreed that science should be open to considering miracles in their theories and

explanations.

Three parallel discussion groups were offered with the same goal: “to identify challenges and opportunities in science” in the areas of a) origins, b) environmental stewardship and c) Global Health. Findings from all three groups were presented later in the day, all three were filmed, and they are available on the AAAS web site.

During our sit-down lunch, we were invited to consider and discuss our own preference for ongoing science and religion dialogue, being given four options: a) to work together to find harmony, b) to collaborate and work with our differences, c) to stick with the idea that “good fences make good neighbors”, or d) a different idea of our own creation. The overwhelmingly popular choice was b) to collaborate and work with our differences.

After lunch there was another two-hour period for discussion on “Strategies for Improving Dialogue” with our choice of the following:

- a) Scientists and the Religious Public: Approaches to Better Dialogue
- b) Science and Religion in the Media
- c) Science Engagement in Congregations: Confronting controversy and building bridges.

In the closing session: Nobel Laureate William D. Phillips (a member of Fairhaven United Methodist Church in Gaithersburg, MD and a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board) reflected on “Why perceptions and dialogue matter.” His points included: “DNA is hardware: the Soul is software.” Conversations change perceptions. Scientists and people of faith have common cause, and they are often the same people. They share a desire to discover truth, but if we don’t trust each other we will be ineffective in the causes that bind us. Science has a responsibility to interpret its findings to the general public, who are often religious. If there is no respect, the partnership fails. Phillips said: “Looking at the images from the Hubble telescope makes me think of the psalm: the heavens are telling the glory of God.” Science asks: “where did we come from” and “where are we going”? Science fears admitting there may be another way than the scientific method: such an admission would threaten their life’s work. Religion fears discoveries that shake the foundation of their faith. Face to face conversations help to heal the divide. Phillips concluded: “At the end of my life, the central issue will not be a religion/ science question, but rather: How have I treated my fellow human beings? Hopefully with civility, respect and humble listening. This is what Perceptions is promoting, and this is what is really important.”

Closing observation: Remember that faith is intellectual inquiry yoked to prayer (Pope John Paul).

Article by Rev. Angela Maves

“Did My Brain Make Me Do it? Neuroscience and Morality”

On December 11, 2014, two experts on human behavior squared off to discuss whether brain activity determines how one behaves or if human behavior is determined by more the just brain function.

Anthony-Samuel LaMantia, director of the George Washington Institute of Neuroscience, and professor in GWU's Department of Pharmacology and Physiology, sided with those that say “that research shows an absolute equivalence between the structure of a brain and that individual's behavior, especially complex behavior. ‘Brain equals behavior,’” he declared. Taking the



Anthony-Samuel
LaMantia



Paul Root Wolpe

opposite view was Paul Root Wolpe, director of the Center for Ethics at Emory University, professor of bioethics and Distinguished Research Chair in Jewish Bioethics, and a senior bioethicist with NASA. For him, our brain structures do not fully generate behavior because brain structure itself is not enough. Through learning, we fill our brains with content and it is this accumulated content in our brains that has a profound effect on our behavior. A summary of the event can be found [here](#) and the complete video can be found [here](#).

The Dispositionalist Deity: How God Creates Laws and Why Theists Should Care



We normally do not post long, academically oriented articles in our newsletter but I made an exception to this practice when I read Ben Page's article on the nature of physical laws. Published in the March 15, 2015 issue of *Zygon, the Journal of Religion and Science* (pp 113-137), the abstract reads as follows: "How does God govern the world? For many theists 'laws of nature' play a vital role. But what are these laws, metaphysically speaking? I shall argue that laws of nature cannot be external to the objects they govern, but instead should be thought of as reducible to internal features of properties. Recent metaphysics and philosophy of science has revived a dispositionalist conception of nature, according to which nature is not passive, but active and dynamic. Disposition theorists see particulars as being internally powerful rather than being governed by external laws of nature, making external laws in effect ontologically otiose. I will argue that theists should prefer a dispositionalist ontology, since it leads them towards the theory of concurrentism in divine conservation, rather than occasionalism, and revives the distinction between internal and external teleology. God on this view does not govern the world through external laws of nature, but rather through internal aspects of powerful properties". Mr Page, a student in his final year of work at Oxford has agreed to allow us to post his article on WesleyNexus. However, as I have done above, any citations from of the article should refer to the Zygon published version only. The article can be found [here](#). It also can be found on Academia.edu

Tom Oord's Blog: Distinguishing Two Types of Free Process Defense



Tom Oord provides helpful distinctions between two versions of process thought which describe God's relationship to the evils we find in the world. For Oord, the general idea of the free process defense says that in a dynamic world with complex systems that interact, there are multiple ways that elements of these systems can affect one another and in these interactions, there is freedom, spontaneity and randomness which can lead to negative results. "The free process defense says God could not interrupt the regularities of existence without God causing greater negative consequences in existence. In fact, God not interrupting the processes of the world is, theologically speaking, as sign of divine faithfulness. As John Polkinghorne puts it, 'the regularities of the mechanical aspects of nature are to be understood theologically as signs of the faithfulness of the Creator'". Within this basic understanding, there are two differing perspectives, one which Oord affirms and one which he does not. To read his post go to

<http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/two-forms-of-free-process-defense>.

Note: Tom Oord is on the Advisory Board of WesleyNexus.

Stephen Freeland speaks at Washington DC ASA Section meeting



On March 14, at the monthly meeting of the Washington regional chapter of the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA), Dr. Stephen Freeland, an astrobiologist and the new Director of Interdisciplinary Studies at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), presented a superb analysis of the contrast between “intelligent design” and “the evolutionary origin of genetic information.” In his new position, Stephen seeks to foster scholarship and teaching beyond the interdisciplinary science of astrobiology with particular emphases on the interface of science and religion, and using the full spectrum of creative expertise presented by the arts and humanities to visualize and communicate science and engineering. His personal research focuses upon the earliest evolution of life on our planet. In particular, he studies the emergence of the genetic code, the biochemical interface by which organisms translate genetic instructions into living bodies. Freeland is a believing Christian and a long time member of the American Scientific Affiliation, which brings together affirming Christians and scientists in many diverse fields (for more information go to www.asa3.org). Freeland holds a bachelor's degree in zoology (Oxford), a master's degree in computer science (University of York), and a PhD in genetics (Cambridge University). He served 4 years as the project manager for the University of Hawaii node of the NASA Astrobiology Institute where he oversaw a highly interdisciplinary team working on diverse topics relating to the origin, distribution and evolution of life in the universe.

At our meeting, Stephen presented the case for the “Evolutionary Origin of Genetic Information.” Any living branch of science achieves progress by testing new ideas. The results of these tests determine whether each new idea is accepted as a change to what we thought we knew, dismissed as incorrect or simply stagnates owing to a lack of clear evidence. For evolutionary theory, one such proposition is that some features of genetic information cannot evolve through natural processes unless we allow a role for an intelligent designer. This proposition claims testability by defining information in a way that usually reserved for human creations, such as computer programming code. The underlying idea is that we know intelligent beings create computer-code, so if similar features occur within genetic information then perhaps genetic information derives from an intelligent agency? However, many biologists perceive that they are able to understand exactly where life’s genetic information comes from (e.g., the local environment) by thinking in terms of more fundamental and well-established definitions of information that do not involve Intelligent Design. Current science does not have a detailed, widely-accepted description for how a genetic information system evolved in the first place. Intelligent Design proponents suggest that this is a key weakness of existing evolutionary theory, consistent with the need for an intelligent designer.

In contrast, Freeland described the progress that mainstream science has made towards understanding the origin of genetic information since the molecular basis of genetic information was first understood. He presented his basic question (and his thesis) at the outset of his talk: “Biological evolution describes a natural process that transfers information from a local environment into the chemical known as DNA. Something similar happens when gravity causes raindrops to form a puddle, and the shape of the ground beneath becomes reflected in the underside of the chemical known as water.” He made a very strong case for the “natural” emergence of the genetic code, but he encouraged listeners to reach their own conclusions. Whether minds were changed is another matter: what ensued was a vigorous discussion on many key points, and ended with a penetrating dialogue on the impact of this emerging knowledge for faithful Christians in the 21st century.

WesleyNexus participants should visit the ASA website and consider joining ASA, or attending the forthcoming 2015 national meeting July 24-27 being held at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa.

Article by Maynard Moore, PhD

Event Review: [Blumberg Dialogues on Astrobiology](#)

Reminder of Upcoming Events:

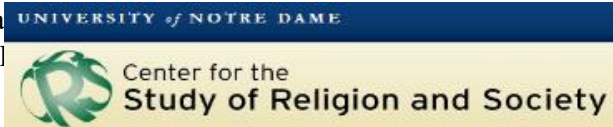
Transhumanism Conference, Conference Dates: July 26-31, 2015
Chaired by: Don Braxton, J Omar Good Professor of Religion
Huntingdon, PA



Technology is leading humanity into some wondrous and peculiar places. Daily reports point to the emergence of quantitatively and qualitatively new modes of existence, knowledge, and behavior. The conference - Our Transhuman Futures - brings together people from all over the world who are pioneering the edges of these realities. It will be four days of exciting presentations, demos, theater pieces, and art exhibits of our transhuman futures. Consider what projects you might present at this exciting event. Network with others working in these fields. Registration is now open and we are accepting proposals in many domains. Visit the webpage <https://sites.google.com/site/transjuniata/>.

“New Conversations in Science and Religion: What Difference Might Critical Realist Philosophy Make?”

An Interdisciplinary Conference, July 30-31, 2015, University of Notre Dame, IN
Center for the Study of Religion and Society, Christian Philosophy
CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT and CALL FOR PAPERS



<http://csrs.nd.edu/events/newconversations/>

Critical realism is an innovative philosophical framework with the potential to open up space for constructive dialogue between the natural and social sciences, the study of religion, the humanities, and people and communities of faith. Critical realism seems more suited than other competing philosophies of science (positivism, hermeneutics, postmodernism) to take seriously the truth claims and inner worlds of religious believers. A neo-Aristotelian realism of this kind takes seriously ontology and emergence, which allows for considering ideas like “love,” “forgiveness,” “virtue,” “flourishing,” and “divinity” as real and powerful causal forces, important for a more complete explanation of social phenomena. Religious perspectives may also have much to learn about science through critical realism. The goal of this conference is to further advance dialogues between science, religion, philosophy, and theology by drawing diverse thinkers together to consider the possibilities of better mutual understanding across these different fields of knowledge and inquiry.

This one day-long mini-conference immediately follows the annual meeting of the International Association of Critical Realism (IACR), also to be held at the University of Notre Dame campus, from July 27-30, 2015. The joint scheduling of these two conferences is intended to encourage overlap between the two conferences’ participants. Consider attending both conferences, from July 27-31. Thanks to several generous grants we are able to provide housing and food at a very low cost to participants. The cost of

attendance at the one-day conference is \$125.00, which includes two nights lodging and full board (three meals daily). The cost of attendance at the IACR conference is \$400.00, which includes five nights lodging and full board. The registration deadline is May 30, 2015. After that deadline, an additional \$40.00 charge will be applied. (We are also able to provide a limited number of scholarships to faculty from colleges and universities (1) with a Catholic mission or (2) affiliated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).

More information is available at: <http://csrs.nd.edu/events/newconversations/>

**61st Annual meeting of the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science
Star Island (off Portsmouth), New Hampshire, August 8-15, 2015
Call for Papers, deadline February 1, 2015; website: www.iras.org.**



The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science

Theme: Unsettling Science and Religion: Contributions & Questions from Queer Studies

The goal of the 2015 IRAS conference is to borrow the techniques and challenges from within queer studies and queer theory, with the goal of unsettling—or “queering”—our own discipline(s). To this end, we call for papers and poster presentations on topics at the intersection of religion, science and queer theory. This might include ways to challenge the boundaries within and between religion and science, and or between and within the academy, as well as the boundaries of the sacred and secular, of reason and faith. Ultimately, we want to ask how queer religion, science and philosophy, can and/or should be.

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Confirmed keynote speakers include: Carol Wayne White, Karen Barad, Fern Feldman, Billy Grassie, Catherine Keller, Laurel Schneider, Emilie Townes, Claudia Schippert, Whitney Bauman, Lisa Stenmark, and Chapel Speaker, Donna Schaper.

