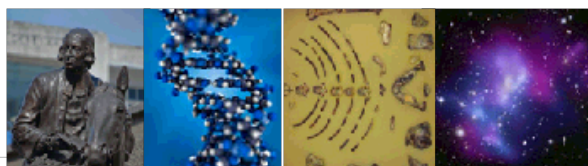


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



Home 15

Back

Links

Contact Us

Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

July 18, 2016

Developments in our understanding of brain, mind and even soul have undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Where there once were fairly clear points of delineation and conceptual differentiation has gradually moved towards interdisciplinary engagement. New methods of the neurological research have generated reams of research papers mapping out correlations between brain, mind and human behavior while at the same time organizations such as the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion conducts research linking culture and the mind as they focus on religious behaviors, beliefs, and experiences (see <http://www.ibcsr.org/>). Our religious concepts such as soul, spirit, grace and sin are being viewed in terms of a fully integrated understanding of what it means to be a person. In this month's newsletter, we are focusing on articles that point to some of these changes. They challenge our tendency to partition knowledge into simple, self-contained boxes. Of particular interest to those within the Wesleyan tradition is the article by Alan Weissenbacher where the nature of Christian conversion is addressed in the context of neuroscience. Supplementing this article is a recent piece from the Washington Post where a distinguished psychiatrist reflects on his role as a medical consultant in cases involving demonic possession, the context being the Roman Catholic Church but other faiths as well. We hope you take time to read and reflect on these and other articles in this newsletter. Perhaps some unexamined assumptions challenged, new insights gained or new questions emerge. At the very least, we hope they will be a stimulus for conversation with others. Enjoy!

WesleyNexus is an all-volunteer organization and relies on our participants to continue our presence on the web and to develop in-person programs. We thank everyone who helped contribute to this effort. Going forward, we will need support for our ongoing programs and to accumulate funds for the rest of the year. As always, all funds that we collect as donations 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 either through PayPal receipt or by letter.** 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, Maynard, and the rest of the
WesleyNexus Board of Directors

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WesleyNexus to Help Launch Discovery & Faith

On July 10th, the WesleyNexus Board members voted unanimously to launch a new program focus, Discovery & Faith, which will develop ministry resources that bring real hands-on, minds-on science into the Christian curriculum, with a particular focus on children's ministry. Jennifer Secki Shields, who has served as a member of the WesleyNexus executive board since 2012, will serve as the founding director of Discovery & Faith. The website www.DiscoveryandFaith.org will launch in September 2016. If you would like to learn more about the work of Discovery & Faith, please contact connect@DiscoveryandFaith.org



Why We Must Bring Real Science into Our Discipleship Ministries

There are many challenges facing Christ's church today as she does her work in a post-Christian culture, but chief among them is knowing how to make disciples who are equipped for living faithfully in a world shaped by science. Here are four facts we ought to take seriously:

- Young people are leaving the church in historically unprecedented numbers¹;
- One of the top reasons why young people are leaving the church today is their perception that the church is anti-science⁽¹⁾;
- Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible¹;
- Young people in schools worldwide have the impression of a conflict between science and religious faith by the age of 11 (2).

The question, then, that must be asked by all Christian pastors, parents, educators, youth ministers, and small group leaders is:

How can we better make disciples for Jesus Christ in an age of science?

For more than 15 years now as a Director of Christian Education in local church ministry, I have met the questions at the intersection of science-and-faith asked by young adults, youth, and children (even children as young as 4-years-old!). The questions are too many to list here, but they matter deeply to the people we serve as they learn the stories of our faith and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. And our answers to their questions profoundly impact their perception of the church and the religious faith it teaches. Is following Jesus today a reasonable, reliable, and relevant thing to do? Or does it require intellectual dishonesty?

This is not merely an interesting academic issue. This is where the "rubber meets the road" for evangelism and discipleship in the 21st century. If the church can't speak honestly and openly about scientific truth, like the reality of evolution, how then would we expect anyone to take us seriously when we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ? It is not enough for any church to be content simply knowing "we are not an anti-science church." Instead, churches must boldly witness to the ways in which their theology and teaching are scientifically-informed. Our ministries must intentionally and openly demonstrate how faith can interact positively with science. Likewise, we must learn to speak about our faith in a "language" that makes sense to a culture shaped by science. And, we must stop underestimating the intelligence and perceptions of our digital savvy children, who are in need of more rigorous theology at earlier ages.

What difference can it make when we bring science into the church? Over the past 8 years, I have been blessed to facilitate my church's children's ministry as it grew from nonexistence to vibrancy. Based on parent feedback, I know that our intentional incorporation of science into our curriculum contributed to that growth. My pastor has been participating in Evolution Weekend for many years now. This past February, our congregation marked Evolution Weekend with a Sunday we called "Celebrating Faith & Science." We hosted a guest speaker for worship and a "Mad Science" event for children—and saw our Sunday morning attendance increase by ~50%. All this to say, one of the church's biggest challenges today—engaging science in positive ways—can become fruitful opportunity. Making disciples for Jesus Christ in an age of science requires it.

About the Author

Jennifer Secki Shields earned her B.A. (major field: biology) at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. As a doctoral student at the University of Virginia she studied evolutionary biology, conducted field research, and served as an Award-winning graduate teaching assistant and a graduate teaching consultant. In several years of teaching and doing science outreach programs, she often found herself answering "God questions" from people who wanted to know how she could be a Christian and an evolutionist. In 2000, Jennifer became the Director of Christian Education at Christ Crossman UMC (Falls Church, Virginia) and, since then, has focused a great deal on teaching at the intersection of science and faith. She has witnessed firsthand how an emphasis on faith-and-science contributed to the growth of her church's children's ministry from nonexistence into the vibrant program it is today. On July 24th, she will leave that position to focus full-time on Discovery & Faith and help other churches bring science into their discipleship programming. From 2004-2016 Jennifer served as the chairperson for the annual Blackstone Seminar for Science, Theology, Ethics & Ministry, an endowed program at the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center. She continues to serve on the executive board of WesleyNexus. If you would like to learn more about the work of Discovery & Faith, please contact connect@DiscoveryandFaith.org

References Cited

- (1) Kinnaman, David. 2011. [You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith](#). Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- (2) Coyle, Lizzie. New Approaches to Communicating Science and Faith to Children. At <http://biologos.org> [here](#).

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From Pacific Coast Theological Society (November 15, 2015)

The Neuroscience of Wesleyan Soteriology: The Dynamic of Both Instantaneous and Gradual Change by Alan Weissenbacher

Abstract: In his work *Rewired: Exploring Religious Conversion*, dealing with Wesleyan soteriology and neuroscience, Paul Markham claims that when one incorporates biology as an epistemic restriction in theologies of conversion, doctrines of instantaneous conversion are invalidated. He asserts that conversion must always be gradual since the mechanism by which the brain changes in response to experience does not occur instantaneously; rather change is initiated and consolidated over an often lengthy span of time. I argue, however, that in many theological cases, the possibility of immediate neurological change is irrelevant as statements of instantaneous change are in terms of a relational status and not physical, and, additionally, in those doctrinal areas where immediate biological change is warranted, such change is neurologically possible in a variety of ways. The article can be found [here](#).



Shared Spirituality Among Human Persons and Artificially Intelligent Agents by Mark Graves

Abstract: Technical advances in artificial intelligence make somewhat likely the possibility of robotic or software agents exhibiting or extending human-level intelligence within a few decades. Intelligent or superintelligent agents have tremendous cultural and ethical implications as well as raise interesting philosophical and theological questions of personhood. Theological investigation can orient the development of the agent's intelligent communication capacities and moral reasoning abilities to meet significant research goals in artificial intelligence as well as lay a foundation for a shared relational spirituality. Josiah Royce's Loyalty-to-Loyalty and philosophy of community provide a semiotic model of spirituality which can guide the development and functioning of an agent's interpretive processes within a moral framework. A Roycean community valuing mutual understanding through intelligent communication yields an ethical system within which intelligent agents can relate to humans and further develop their understanding of and engagement with the world.

Mark Graves is the author of *Mind, Brain and the Elusive Soul: Human Systems of Cognitive Science and Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). The article can be found [here](#). A review of Grave's book can be found [here](#).

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As a psychiatrist, I diagnose mental illness. Also, I help spot demonic possession. By Richard Gallagher

Most of the time we feel we have a generally accurate understanding of human nature and human behavior. Science has done much to map the foundations of both normal and abnormal human actions. Psychiatry in particular has come a long way from the Freudian couch to begin to understand the linkages between chemistry, brain, mind and behavior. Even so, there are times when even the most scientifically grounded can find themselves reaching for explanations. In this quite challenging article, Dr. Richard Gallagher reflects on his role as a psychiatric consultant for multiple denominations identifying cases of mental illness vs cases of "literally, the devil's work." Though it may be easy to discount some of his reflections, he closes his article: "Those who dismiss these cases unwittingly prevent patients from receiving the help they desperately require, either by failing to recommend them for psychiatric treatment (which they most clearly need) or by not informing their spiritual ministers that something beyond a mental or other illness seems to be the issue. For any person of science or faith, it should be impossible to turn one's back on a tormented soul." Read and reflect. You can find the article [here](#).



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Gentle Discipleship: Theological Reflections on Dementia by John Swinton

The science and religion dialogue is a deeply intellectual pursuit inviting participants to encounter the depths of human understanding from the perspective of multiple scientific and theological disciplines. Ironically, as John Swinton ably presents, perhaps one of the more challenging situations a scientifically and theologically informed person can find themselves in is to work with people with emotional and cognitive deficiencies. As Swinton says, "To have an ailment which affects the intellect and, apparently, strips a person of their autonomy and intellectual prowess, and which brings about apparent radical changes to the self, offers some important theological and practical challenges. The subjective, cognitively aware "I" which



is the central focus of much contemporary and historical theology is not available, or at least is radically revised, within the lives of people with such life experiences.” You can find Swinton’s article [here](#).

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Krista Tippett: On Being – The Body’s Grace with Mark Sanford

“An unusual take on the mind-body connection with author and yoga teacher Matthew Sanford. He's been a paraplegic since the age of 13. He shares his wisdom for us all on knowing the strength and grace of our bodies even in the face of illness, aging, and death. “

[ht](#)

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Trauma Theory: A Blog by C. Fred Alford

Every so often, one comes across a website that catches one off balance and is both puzzling and intriguing at the same time. C. Fred Alford’s Trauma Theory blog is one of those. As he states on his about page, “Traumatheory.com combines reviews of books about trauma with thoughts on everything from the state of PTSD in DSM 5 to whether the diagnosis of PTSD even makes sense. Trauma has become a popular category from which to analyze everything from literature to history. One recent work discovers PTSD in Psalm 137, another in the Epic of Gilgamesh. While trauma is no doubt real, its expression is a social and political construction. All categories are that. But it means we need to take a critical look at the category of trauma. That’s what my blog posts do.” There are more than a year’s worth of postings. I hope you find something of interest. You can find his blog [here](#).



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Event Summary

62nd Annual Summer Conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science by E. Maynard Moore, President of WesleyNexus

When the excursion boat Thomas Leighton reaches its destination at the dock on Star Island, some 10 kilometers out in the Atlantic off the coast of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the Pelicans (summer interns)

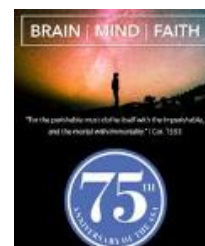


gather to chant “You did come back, You did come back” and the IRAS Summer conference gets under way. The theme this year was “Co-Creating Knowledge: How Can We Know?” – a question asked from the perspectives of sociology, astronomy, anthropology, biology, physics, psychology, philosophy, theology – all within a futurist framework. How do religious, scientific and secular traditions differ? What are the biological foundations of morality? What have we been missing in the science and religion dialogue? The questions seemed endless, and the answers were hard to come by. But the 135 participants from all over the world attempted to move beyond agreeing to disagree. And with imagination constantly at the forefront, we all had fun while engaging in the dialogue. Resource leaders were plentiful: Wentzel Van Huysteen from South Africa, anthropologist Jonathan Marks, psychologist Louise Sundararajan, philosopher Philip Cary, Jesuit astronomer Christopher Corbally, were among the dozen or so presenters. In addition, there were a series of papers presented by younger scholars who shared much of their contemporary research – topics such as: Why do some people continue to believe in discredited knowledge? Is there a role for “non-rational” thinking in scientific knowing? What is the biological foundations for human phenotypic morality? How does cross-cultural conversation add to a “whole-self” understanding? Why are facts not sufficient for knowledge? One of these early sessions, presented by Ardon Schorr, a biology PhD candidate at Carnegie Mellon University, had a high impact on most of the subsequent discussions throughout the week. Referencing the Cultural Cognition project at Yale University, Schorr convincingly demonstrated how and why scientific research is often rejected in the larger population because it threatens a person's identify. When a scientific finding triggers this “identity protection mode,” it backfires and polarization occurs. The challenge this presents to us all, scientists and theologians alike, is to find ways to communicate by bridging the gap between curiosity and identity. Throughout the five or six substantive dialogues with the speakers each day, conference co-chairs John Teske (U.S.), Pat Bennett (U.K.), and Ruben Nelson (Canada) steered the conversations through respectful dialogue and eye-opening information. The morning chapel talks engaged the imagination of all who attended; the meals provided excellent opportunities for informal conversations; happy hour and the daily song-fest on the deck outside Newton house brought people into high spirits; the small group dialogues on the wide porch outside Oceanic promoted deep personal sharing; the daily candlelight meditations and the after-hours star-gazing with telescopes added to the wonders of the week. There is no doubt why academics and scientists continue to come from across the globe every summer to Star Island for the IRAS annual conference. In 2017, the focus will be on **The “Wicked Problem” of Climate Change: What is it Doing to us and for us?** The dates are set: June 24-July 1, 2017 and for the first time, the conference will reflect a new partnership between IRAS and the **Parliament of the World's Religions**, with a special focus on problems associated with water and food – the devastating effects on the welfare and well-being of children throughout the world. WesleyNexus is recognized as one of the collaborating organizations with IRAS, so we will keep everyone in our network apprised of developments, and we encourage each of you to take seriously the opportunity that the IRAS Summer Conference affords for dialogue and deepening your spiritual commitments within the science & religion dialogue. More information will be appearing each month on the IRAS website: www.iras.org.

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Brain/Mind/Faith

Ted Davis and Justin Barrett will be two of the five plenary speakers at the American Scientific Affiliation 2016 Annual Meeting at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, CA. The ASA Annual Meeting is being held on July 22-25, 2016. “Brain | Mind | Faith” will include various topical areas for parallel oral sessions. These areas include: Christian Women in Science and Engineering, Physical Sciences, Life and Environmental Sciences, Mind



Sciences, Teaching Faith and Science, and more. There will be both introductory and advanced workshops on issues in science and faith. Be sure to stop by the BioLogos booth and receive additional papers and information on science and faith. – (From Biologos.org). Mike Beidler, Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Section of the ASA, along with several others in our section, will be attending the Azusa Conference, and we hope will offer his usual, insightful report for a future WesleyNexus newsletter. See more at: <http://network.asa3.org/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=798428>

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