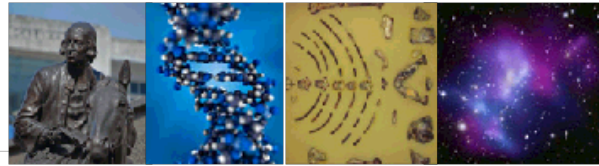


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



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Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

August 29, 2017

Earlier this month, millions of Americans interrupted their lives to watch a total eclipse cross the entire United States, coast-to-coast, for the first time since 1918. That so many Americans paused to participate in an act of collective wonder highlights how faith and science intersect in people's lives and reaffirms two facts. First, that science is good at what science does, making accurate predictions about the natural world. Second, that wonder—expressed by Christians and non-Christians alike—is alive and well!



By Tom Oord: Total solar eclipse in a remote Idaho mountain location.

The countdown to this historic and joyous event took place at the same time that we witnessed the raw, and even violent reality, of the racial and political divisions in the U.S. We at WesleyNexus found it hard to focus on our work in the midst of such heartbreaking events. But, we believe that the faith-and-science dialogue has much to offer for such a time as this.”

The mission of WesleyNexus is to draw on the Wesleyan tradition to equip persons for the practices of faith, mission, and ministry in a world shaped by science. The first article in this month's issue, "What the 2017 Eclipse Tells Us About Our Church Ministry," goes to the heart of why science matters in the life of the church. The next five articles highlight different ways that people are thinking about the nature of God, life, and the relationship between the two. Two articles on genetic engineering and one on climate change relate to the Christian work of social justice and, in the case of genetic engineering, perhaps leads us to a place where technology meets pastoral counseling.

We hope you will find something in this month's newsletter that will provide insight and guidance and bring you closer to the sacred in your life and your community.

We continue to appreciate the collaborating groups and sponsors that helped us underwrite expenses for our February live-streamed event, especially The Clergy Letter Project and the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science, but also the several churches and individuals who have sent donations since January 1. Over the summer, we will continue to receive funds for our programs this coming fall and spring, so if you can manage a contribution, large or small, it will help us tremendously. WesleyNexus is a 501(c)(3) charitable, educational organization, and we will acknowledge all gifts from individuals for tax reporting purposes.

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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Guest Post: What the 2017 Eclipse Asks Us About Our Church Ministry, by Jennifer Secki Shields

In this article, Jennifer describes a local gathering to observe the 2017 eclipse, making a beautiful connection between this natural event and her faith. She challenges us as a faith community by asking “did we, the church, connect with our science-shaped culture or did we miss an opportunity to point to the living God”?



Jennifer Secki Shields was trained as a biologist, and was the long-term Director of Christian Education at Christ Crossman United Methodist Church in Virginia. She is a member of the WesleyNexus Board of Directors and most recently the founder of Discovery and Faith <http://www.discoveryandfaith.org/> which is affiliated with and supported by WesleyNexus. You can find her article [here](#).

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Conversations on The Uncontrolling Love of God

On August 24 and 25, a unique Facebook event took place. Conversations of The Uncontrolling Love of God brings together 40 contributors to a new book Uncontrolling Love: Essays Exploring the Love of God, providing background and personal stories behind each contributor’s essay. What makes this coming together unique is the breadth of perspective and tradition brought to the discussion. The contributors were not limited to those within the Wesleyan tradition but included people from progressive, traditional, evangelical and charismatic backgrounds. The thematic center was reflecting on Tom Oord’s recent book The Uncontrolling Love of God where God is understood as both fully involved but also fundamentally uncontrolling with creation. You can find the schedule and the contents for each discussion [here](#). Videos of each session are posted on each contributor’s Facebook page and will also be posted at the “[Conversations on “The Uncontrolling Love of God”](#)” page. Tom Oord is a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board and a good friend of WesleyNexus. Rick Barr is a member of the WesleyNexus Board of Directors and was one of the participants.



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American Scientific Affiliation Conference 2017 – Golden, Colorado

From all accounts that we have heard, the 76nd Annual Meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation, held at the end of July at the Colorado School of Mines, was a great success, with good attendance and excellent dialogue among participants. We call attention here to several presentations offered by colleagues in our local dialogue network in the Washington DC area. Dr. Paul Arveson, who continues to coordinate a Sunday discussion group called “the Wrestlers” at the National Presbyterian Church, provided an illustrated talk on Solar Household Energy projects in developing countries, which he called “Extinguishing the Three-Stone Fire.” Paul is a retired scientist who is now focusing energy and



resources on cookstove research and implementation projects in areas where there is severe deforestation and refugee camps that stretch for miles and contain hundreds of thousands of people. Among the partners for these projects, Paul lists Lutheran World Relief, the National Presbyterian Church and Rotary International. Another of our colleagues, **Dr. Sy Garte**, who served on the WesleyNexus Board from 2014 to 2016, presented a talk on “The Teleological Biochemistry of Evolution,” Dr. Garte’s claim is that natural selection imposes a purpose on all biological creatures, which is to achieve, by random variation, maximum fitness, through a mechanism identified as the biochemical process of evolution. A third colleague, Dick Fischer, presented a paper on “The Genesis 5 Patriarchs and the Sumerian King List,’ asking “Is there a Commonality?” Another colleague, physicist **Dr. Paul H. Carr**, who is in the leadership of IRAS, the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science, with which WesleyNexus is collaborating, presented a talk called “Balancing Economics with Ethics to Save God’s Creation.” All of the papers at the ASA Conference can be found on this comprehensive list, with audio and the accompanying slides linked: <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/resources/ASA2017AnnualMeetingStatic.html>

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Reminder: God and Human Suffering: Conversations on 21st Century Genetics and Our Shared Future
October 6, 2017
(from Covalence, The Lutheran Alliance for Faith, Science, and Technology)
Episcopal Conference Center of Utah, 75 South 200 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84111
 (more details to come)

This faith and science workshop on human germ-line editing is sponsored by the University of Utah: Department of Pediatrics, Division of Medical Genetics and UCEER Center for Excellence in Ethical, Legal and Social Implications); the Rocky Mountain Synod and its Utah Conference of the ELCA, Mount Tabor Lutheran Church of Salt Lake; and the Episcopal Diocese of Utah. Questions event leaders will be pondering include: What is our shared mission as people of science, ethics, and faith? What is the role of recent dialogue regarding germ-line editing of human embryos and in the development of regulations that both promote the alleviation of suffering, and protect the inherent diversity of our planet?



<http://luthscitech.org/event/god-human-suffering-conversations-21st-century-genetics-shared-future/>

You can also read the Covalence journal [here](#).

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Science and Religion: Conflict or Consonance? By Alexander Stern

Those of us who have participated in science and religion discussions are used to the notion that science and religion are not in conflict. Many persons of faith are also professionally engaged in cutting edge scientific research in a wide variety of scientific disciplines. What this lack of conflict means, however, is not so easy to articulate. Some think that they are two different spheres that do not overlap. Stephen J. Gould’s famous acronym NOMA or non-overlapping magisteria (see a short article by Gould [here](#)) claims that respectful disagreement and distance is the best way to view the relationship. Stern’s article presents a perspective where “theological reasoning might yet have something to say about our understanding of the material world and our place in it.” Focusing on a recent conference at Notre Dame University celebrating the work of Ernan McMullin, Stern argues for a process that aims for



consonance, not separation. Borrowing from his own Jewish background, Stern proposes that “instead of expanding one’s own tradition to encompass others, we should, as the Hillelite example counsels, engage with opposing points of view in order to see the limits of our own — in order to see ourselves, to the extent possible, as adherents of a particular tradition... Thus viewed, the conflict between science and religion should not be extinguished, but rather, in a certain sense, stoked. Consonance lies not in a single, settled perspective, but in refusing to settle, constantly shifting and modifying one’s perspective in an attempt to overcome — to the extent possible — the limitations of one’s own tradition”. The article can be found [here](#).

Alexander Stern earned his doctorate in philosophy from Notre Dame and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. He has written for The New York Times, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington Monthly, and Humanities magazine. His book, **The Fall of Language: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on the Aesthetics of Meaning**, will be published by Harvard University Press in 2018.

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How Fossil Fuel Money Made Climate Change Denial the Word of God by Brendan O’Conner

While WesleyNexus does not engage in political advocacy nor endorse any political party or philosophy, we do from time to time post interesting articles that are controversial when they touch issues of science and religion. The article by Brendan O’Conner is one such article. The story he tells is about how powerful interests aligned with evangelical leaders combined to thwart leaders such as Richard Cizik, National Association of Evangelicals vice president of governmental affairs, efforts to be responsible as far as climate change is concerned. It is a complex story that blends scientific understanding, politics and theology. You can find it [here](#).



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First Support for a Physics Theory of Life By Natalie Wolchover

“The biophysicist Jeremy England made waves in 2013 with a new theory that cast the origin of life as an inevitable outcome of thermodynamics. His equations suggested that under certain conditions, groups of atoms will naturally restructure themselves so as to burn more and more energy, facilitating the incessant dispersal of energy and the rise of “entropy” or disorder in the universe. England said this restructuring effect, which he calls dissipation-driven adaptation, fosters the growth of complex structures, including living things. The existence of life is no mystery or lucky break, he told Quanta in 2014, but rather follows from general physical principles and “should be as unsurprising as rocks rolling downhill.”



Read the rest of the article [here](#).

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Gene editing: Gateway to Promised Land, or key to Pandora’s box? by Yonat Shimron

The last few months we have highlighted articles and lectures on gene editing also known as CRISPR. This month, we focus on an interview by Yonat Shimron of bioethicist Arthur Caplan, the founding head of the Division of Bioethics at New York University. As indicated by his NYU faculty page, Caplan has worked with

and for a wide range of institutions from NIH to the International Olympic Committee. He is currently ethics advisor to the U.S. Department of Defense’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency on synthetic biology, a member of the University of Pennsylvania’s External Advisory Committee for its Orphan Diseases, the Ethics and Ebola Working Group of the World Health Organization and an advisor to the National Institutes of Health on organ transplantation. In this article, he recommends three actions that religious groups should take in response to the emergence of CRISPR. “First, get a scientist in to talk to you — someone who understands this and can tell you where we’re at in engineering embryos in humans and animals. Second, what is the obligation to pay for this on the part of the government if it’s really oriented toward diseases and their prevention and treatment? Speak up for fair access. Lastly, religious groups can demand that the scientific community form the kind of oversight body and rules I’m talking about”. Read the whole article [here](#).



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Is God Finite? By Roger Olson

Roger Olson is the Foy Valentine Professor of Theology, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. He is a very influential evangelical theologian who is a frequent commentator on Patheos.org. In a July posting, he reaches beyond his own tradition to engage the question “Is God finite”? In doing so, he reaches back in time to the writing of Edgar Sheffield Brightman and the movement that became known as the Boston Personalists. The Boston Personalists were philosophical theologians at Methodist-affiliated Boston University and had a significant influence on theological, ethical and philosophical thinking for nearly 100 years. Brightman was the intellectual leader of the second generation of Boston Personalists who’s book The Problem of God was his most significant. Per Olson’s reading, God is finite in “that there is inherent in God’s eternal being “the Given” which is a particular nature that governs what God can and cannot do.” Clearly Brightman was no nominalist/voluntarist! He was a realist with regard to God. He believed God has a specific nature and it includes certain limitations that are not voluntary on God’s part. As he unpacks what this means, Olson agrees with Brightman on some points and disagrees as well. It is also interesting to note that he mentions Tom Oord and invites us to think of Oord not as a process theologian but as a Boston Personalist. The article can be found [here](#).



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Science Mike brings religion, science together

Science Mike is not a preacher or theologian, but every week, he answers questions about faith and science in ways that seekers and searchers can understand. Science Mike, aka Mike McHargue, a member of Good Samaritan United Methodist Church in Tallahassee, Florida, has become a major phenomenon on the internet. His “Ask Science Mike” podcast receives upwards of 6,500 downloads a day, and he is in the iTunes “Top 20” podcasters based on measureable internet metrics.



<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/science-mike-brings-religion-science-together>

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Science and Religion in Huntsville, AL

Ever so often, we receive unsolicited emails from people interested in what we are doing at WesleyNexus and invite us to join them in a local science and religion study group. Here is information on their program.

The Discovery Center at Weatherly Heights Baptist Church is sponsoring a **"Science and Religion Series"** from Sept 10 - Nov 19. We have twelve knowledgeable speakers (nominally one a week), usually on Sundays 6:00-7:30pm. See the subjects, teachers and exact dates of our Series at <http://www.weatherly.org/classes/> (2nd class in list).

Note that Dr. Thomas Jay Oord is one of our speakers. The cost is \$40 to attend all twelve lectures and \$10 for individual lectures. Dr. Oord is also giving a special talk entitled "Evil and God's Uncontrolling Love: A Revolutionary New Theology" at 2:00-4:00pm on Sunday Oct 15 (that is free).

We would welcome any attenders. Our address is 1309 Cannstatt Drive, Huntsville, AL 35802.

Questions?
Call Keith Noren
(256) 656-1328.

We appreciate their reaching out to us. This looks like an interesting program with a wide range of topics. If you are in Huntsville, give them a call.

