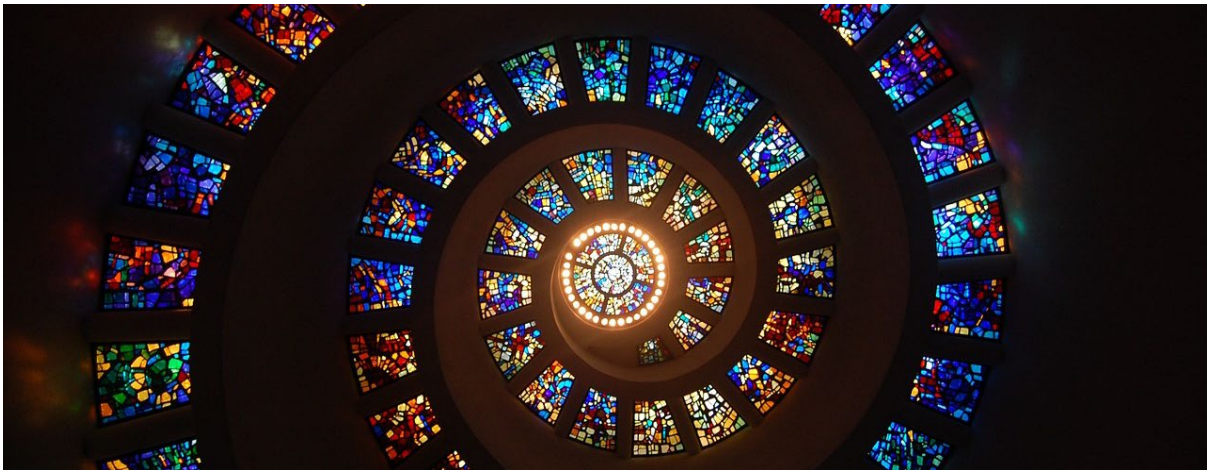




Peacocke @ 100

Filling and Surrounding the World: Pan(en)theism in a Scientific Age



Conference Programme & Abstracts

27th November – 28th November 2024

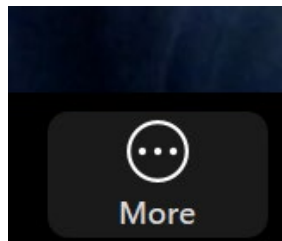
Link for Presentations

All the keynotes and short papers will be available via the same zoom link.

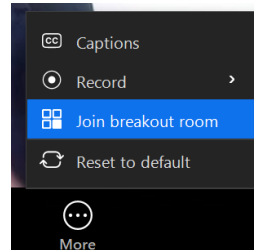
Zoom Link

All breakout rooms will be accessed from the main meeting link above. To enter a breakout room follow these instructions. Any issues on the day, ask via your mic or the chat and Tech Wizard Matt will help you out.

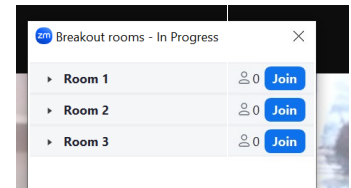
Available to conference delegates



Click on the "more" button at the bottom of the zoom screen



Select "join breakout room"



Select breakout room 1 or room 2 from the pop out.

Please note for conference delegates the Gowland Lecture will be available via the conference Zoom link. To watch & comment live via the Youtube Stream: <https://youtube.com/live/6PXYrOFM1Kc?feature=share>

SRF 50th Anniversary: Hybrid Conference 2025

The 2025 Anniversary conference celebrates 50 years of the Science and Religion Forum. The conference doesn't pose the question of whether science and religion can interact but how and where they are in dialogue. The conference is taking a broad look at the ongoing points of connection and dissonance between science and religion. We welcome papers that engage critically with established/historic positions on science-and-religion as well as those that look forward to the upcoming opportunities and challenges.

Submissions are invited for traditional papers, round table discussions, or interactive workshops related to the conference theme. Works-in-Progress may be submitted for paper and round table sessions. Paper sessions are 30mins, round tables & workshops are 45mins. Timings include any Q&A [please note final timings may be adjusted slightly to ensure a good flow to the conference - speakers will be notified in good time if this occurs].

Students and ECRs may also apply for/be invited to present a "new voices" paper. These are lightning 10minute presentations + 10mins Q&A designed to share an aspect of research or prompt a discussion. It is expected that "new voices" papers will be works-in-progress.

We invite submissions which engage with any issue at the intersection of science and (any) religion. Whilst continuing to value the Christian origins of the Forum, we particularly welcome papers that engage with science and religion from Eastern Orthodox, and non-Christian perspectives which are historically under-represented at our conferences. We encourage speakers to engage directly with the theme "revisiting and reimagining" the relationship. This may include approaches that engage critically with the (continued?) relevance of established/historic positions; addressing underrepresented voices in the sector (including issues related to colonisation, gender, and/or indigenous religions/science); questions of inter/multi disciplinary research, science-and-religion education, and those that look forward to the upcoming opportunities and challenges science-and-religion.

This will be a hybrid conference and we welcome submissions for online delivery to support accessibility of the conference. We will aim to balance online and on site presentations to ensure a mix across the full conference. **BOOKING NOW LIVE**

<https://www.srforum.org/anniversary-2025>

Schedule Day 1 – Wednesday 27th November

	MAIN ROOM	BREAKOUT 1	BREAKOUT 2
12:00-12:10	Conference Welcome		
12:15-1:30	KEYNOTE: Dr Lina Langby - Panentheism, classical theism, & special divine action		
	BREAK	SOCIAL SPACE	NETWORKING SPACE
1:50–2:35	PEACOCKE PRIZE ESSAY: A Hylomorphic Reading of Genesis 1: How Aristotle May Convince Young-Earth-Creationists of Evolution		
2:40 – 3:55	KEYNOTE: Dr Taylor J. Ott - Becoming Friends with the Earth: An Intersectional Feminist Approach to Finding the Divine in the World		
	BREAK	SOCIAL SPACE	NETWORKING SPACE
4:25 – 5:10	Short paper 1: An Ecological Ethics for the Anthropocene	Short paper 2: The Effects of Religious Language Methods on Scientific Realism	
5:15-5:45	Reflections on the works of Arthur Peacocke, Rev. Dr. Michael Fuller		

Schedule Day 2 – Thursday 28th November

	MAIN ROOM	BREAKOUT 1	BREAKOUT 2
9:00 – 9:10	Day 2 Welcome		
9:15–10:30	KEYNOTE: Multiverse Panentheism		
	BREAK	SOCIAL SPACE	NETWORKING SPACE
11:00 – 11:45	New Voices 1 (11:00-11:20) New Voices 3 (11:25-11:45)	New Voices 2 (11:00-11:20) New Voices 5 (11:25-11:45)	
11:50 – 12:35	Short paper 4: Spectral Ontology and Pan(en)theism: Mapping the Nonexistent in a Scientific Cosmos		
	BREAK	SOCIAL SPACE	NETWORKING SPACE
1:00 – 1:45	Short paper 3: The 'hoi polloi' logoi—Maximus the Confessor's incarnational panentheism and the problem of selective design inferences.		
1:45 – 2:05	New Voices 6		
2:05 - 2:15	Conference Plenary		
--NO CONFERENCE ACTIVITY--			
6:30 – 8:30pm	PUBLIC GOWLAND LECTURE – Joanna Leidenhag, Respondent Mariusz Tabaczek		

Keynote & Gowland Lectures

KEYNOTE 1: Panentheism, classical theism, & special divine action

Dr Lina Langby

ABSTRACT: Arthur Peacocke and the theologian and philosopher Philip Clayton defend panentheism as the better option when relating science and religion. They argue that panentheism offers an understanding of how God acts causally in the natural world in ways that do not contradict the natural sciences. What we can call the emergence argument for panentheism states that special divine action, as understood in panentheism, is more coherent with natural science than classical theism is. What reasons are there to think this? In this presentation, I outline what the potential problem with special divine action is and compare how well panentheism fits with natural science, contrasted with classical theism.



*Lina Langby is a Doctor of Philosophy of Religion from the Department of Theology at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research concerns conceptions of God, particularly panentheism and pantheism, and the consequences of different sorts of God-talk. Langby is the author of *God and the World* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2023), and several articles and anthology chapters on pantheism, panentheism, and relational theology. Her most recent articles explore panpsychism and the rights of nature ("What is valuable in human and non-human nature?", in *Nordic Environmental Law Journal*, 2024), and the Holy Spirit as God's relational power ("The Holy Spirit and Kenotic Loving Power," in *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*, 2024).*

KEYNOTE 2: Becoming Friends with the Earth: An Intersectional Feminist Approach to Finding the Divine in the World

Dr Taylor J. Ott

ABSTRACT: This paper argues that friendship is an underdeveloped theological category, but nonetheless the one that is perhaps most adequate for describing our relationships to God and to the earth. Following the work of Mary Hunt, I also argue that the underdeveloped nature of a theology of friendship provides a fortunate entry point for intersectional feminist theology, as it is also largely unburdened by patriarchal baggage. Friendships are interpersonal, political, vulnerable, and essential to being human. They are also faced with the hurdles of toxic relationship; disagreement and competing goals; gaps due to colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice; and human shortcomings and finitude. In dialogue with the "community of creation" paradigm proposed by Elizabeth Johnson and others, humanity's relationship to the earth is also interdependent, vulnerable, political, and shaped by injustice and competing goals, setting friendship as an appropriate relational referent. Moreover, if we assume a panentheistic understanding of the divine, fostering a posture of friendship toward the natural world also shapes us into "friends of God." Finally, the paper appeals to the examples of Jane Goodall and the monks of New Skete as people who have embodied this posture of friendliness in the field.



*Taylor Ott is a postdoctoral research fellow at KU Leuven in Belgium. She is currently working there on a project called "Dissenting Church," which seeks to theorize the role that dissent plays in building ecclesial community. Her contribution to the project takes a critical theory approach to histories of dissent in the Roman Catholic Church, seeking neither to villainize nor valorize dissent, but to accept contestation as a normative part of human life and community, over and against the current Catholic approach of officially disallowing any public expression of dissent. She earned her PhD in Theological and Social Ethics at Fordham University in New York, under the direction of Christine Firer Hinze. Her first book, titled *Conflict and Catholic Social Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, was just published with Routledge this month.*

KEYNOTE 3: Multiverse Panentheism

Dr. Jack Symes

ABSTRACT: Multiverse panentheism claims that God encompasses all possible universes and that a substantial number of possible universes exist. This paper defends a version of multiverse panentheism that is grounded in perfect-being theology, which maintains that God holds all great-making properties to the highest possible degree. In addition to goodness, multiverse

panentheists consider encompassment to be a great-making property, and therefore, God (a maximally encompassing being) is said to encompass all possible universes.

Yujin Nagasawa argues that multiverse panentheism faces a significant problem: the multiverse problem of evil. The argument states that if multiverse realism is true, then there exists a substantial number of possible evils that contradict God's perfect goodness. Nagasawa proceeds to claim that multiverse evil poses a greater threat to multiverse panentheism than actual evil does to traditional theism.

In this talk, I develop two responses to the multiverse problem of evil. The first response (maximal-panentheism) argues that God need not be all-good or all-encompassing. The second response (no evil universes) argues that universes contradicting God's perfect goodness are not possible universes. In the light of these responses, I claim the multiverse problem of evil for multiverse panentheism is no more intractable than the problem of evil for traditional theism. I end the talk by reflecting on the benefits of adopting multiverse panentheism over secular views of the multiverse. Per multiverse panentheism, theists can be confident that evil universes do not exist; in comparison, in a secular multiverse, the world contains substantially (or infinitely) more evil. The resulting view: multiverse atheists, unlike theists, cannot be optimistic about the overall value of existence.



Dr Symes is best known as the producer of The Panpsychist Philosophy Podcast, one of the UK's most popular higher education podcasts. Jack is also the editor of the Talking about Philosophy book series, which features contributions from some of the world's most influential thinkers.

His books include Philosophers on Consciousness: Talking about the Mind (2022), Philosophers on God: Talking about Existence (2024), Defeating the Evil-God Challenge: In Defence of God's Goodness (2024), and Philosophers on How to Live: Talking about Morality (forthcoming).

Jack was named as a BBC New Generation Thinker in 2024.

Gowland Lecture

Lecturer: Dr Joanna Leidenhag & Mariusz Tabaczek (Responding)



Dr Joanna Leidenhag is Associate Professor in Theology and Philosophy at the University of Leeds, UK. Dr Leidenhag is a Christian theologian interested in interdisciplinary engagement with analytic philosophy and with the natural and psychological sciences. Her doctoral research and first book developed a vision of theological panpsychism, which pairs classical Christian doctrine (i.e. doctrine of creation ex nihilo, the incarnation, the resurrection of the body, etc.) with the metaphysics of panpsychism. Panpsychism is the idea that consciousness is not unique to human beings or even animals, but comes in gradients as a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of reality. Her current research interests include theological uses of panpsychism and other positions in philosophy of mind, theological understandings of autism and psychological disorders, the use of science as a source in theology, and an analytic theology of charismatic gifts.

Polish Dominican, theologian and philosopher (he holds Ph.D. in philosophical theology from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, Church Licentiate from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland, and Dr. habil. in philosophy from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland). He currently works as a professor (agregato), vice-dean of theology, and researcher of the Thomistic Institute at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He is also a lecturer at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Krakow, Poland.



He specializes in the science-theology dialogue and the issues concerning divine action and natural sciences, in particular. He is interested in systematic, fundamental, and natural theology, philosophy of nature, philosophy of science (philosophy of biology, in particular), philosophy of causation, and metaphysics



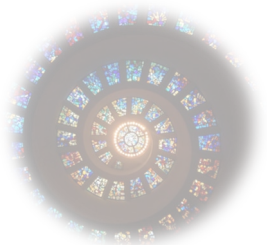
Peacocke Student Essay Prize: A Hylomorphic Reading of Genesis 1: How Aristotle May Convince Young-Earth-Creationists of Evolution

Zishang (Joseph) Yue, University of Oxford

ABSTRACT: Young-Earth-Creationism (YEC) has been pitted against evolution for many decades by both sides, and there seems to be no end to this debate. Aristotelian hylomorphism, however, is able to offer a new reading of Genesis 1 such that the text is literally true in the 'formal' sense, even though evolution is also true in the 'material' sense. Thus, it is possible that the earth is formally 7000 years old, and yet its materiality can be traced back through evolutionary history to the big bang. From a hylomorphic perspective, then, YEC believers are able to conditionally accept evolution without compromising their core convictions. On the one hand, this model is more charitable and probably more effective in communicating the fruits of evolutionary science to YEC advocates, and on the other hand, YEC advocates have the rational responsibility to consider this model due to its merits over various types of YEC. This model also serves as an example of how Aristotelian metaphysics can be employed to resolve problems in science and religion.



(Joseph) Zishang Yue is from Henan, China. He is currently a DPhil candidate in Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, and the 2024 Graduate Scholar in Science and Religion at Oriel College. He is also the 2024 Peacocke Prize winner. Supervised by Prof Mark Harris, Dr Shaun Henson, and Revd Dr Andrew Pinsent, Zishang examines the extent to which theological difficulties caused by the Many-Worlds Interpretation of quantum mechanics could be resolved by Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics. His ultimate interest concerns the nature of Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and its ability, or the lack thereof, to solve various contemporary problems in Science and Religion.



Short Papers

PAPER 1: An Ecological Ethics for the Anthropocene

James Rice, University of Essex

ABSTRACT: This essay examines the relationship between critical theological theories within avant-garde scholarship on religion as a social phenomenon and the equally, if not more, pressing revelations of climate scientists regarding the ecological crisis which is partly the result of a society whose faith has been misplaced in a form of unsustainable technology which threatens to destroy us. In order to take action in a world which has been and will become marred by ever-worsening environmental catastrophes, I argue that we need a new conception of earthly mysticism—one which sees humanity as a shaping force, guided by the political, economic, and innovative promises of secular humanism, but in need of a new morality which can govern the way we relate to the natural world both symbiotically and conscientiously. This new morality, I suggest, is already present in religious ecology, and bringing it into the mainstream, as a force for social, political, religious, and ecological sustainability, is the challenge of our time, both for theorists of the divine, which is ever-present even in secular modernity but threatened by false ideals of our duties of stewardship which undermine the resilience of creation, as well as practitioners of ritual and purveyors of catechism, who often, unfortunately, resist making determinations and proclamations which threaten to upend the status quo, but are necessarily consistent with the teachings of religion as they call on us to care for all things.

PAPER 2: The Effects of Religious Language Methods on Scientific Realism

Benjamin Tabor, Talbot school of Theology

ABSTRACT: God's interaction with the universe continues to be an important topic in the field of science and religion. While this topic is important, I will focus on how Richard Swinburne and Charles Hartshorne use their respective religious language methods to state their claims about omnipresence and divine embodiment. Initially, I aim to prove that religious language methods are the foundation of their omnipresence views. Subsequently, I aim to prove that these language methods effect the validity of realistic claims about scientific laws. In the first section, I will detail Swinburne's univocal religious language method and how it leads him to object to the argument that the universe is God's body. He concludes that such a suggestion possesses misleading notions about the presence of God and His interaction with the universe. In the following section I will turn to Charles Hartshorne, whose employment of an analogical approach to religious language finds its foundation in his argument for Dipolar Theism. His omnipresence view contends that God is embodied by the universe, and that this reconciles questions of how His knowledge and power are immediate at any point in the universe. This will be followed by a final section which details the scientific and theological implications of using each language method, including potential effects on scientific realism and the place of God in explanations of scientific fact. This section will support Swinburne's univocal language, arguing that his language method and objection to divine embodiment provides the least misleading notions about God's involvement in scientific processes. In objection to Hartshorne, this final section will also argue that his panentheism leads to misleading notions about the character of God and His involvement in the universe. Ultimately, this paper will find that Swinburne's method of religious language proves to be both the most helpful method for understanding the nature of God in the omnipresence debate and for determining a more coherent method of scientific realism.



PAPER 3: The 'hoi polloi' logoi—Maximus the Confessor's incarnational panentheism and the problem of selective design inferences.

Andrew Jackson, University of Nottingham

ABSTRACT: Teleological arguments for the existence of God based on biological 'design' have long been out of fashion within the mainstream theological academy that embraces Darwinian evolution. Over the last few decades, however, a growing emphasis on constraint, convergence and cooperation within evolution as important counterbalancing mechanisms to the contingency, divergence and competition of the standard Darwinian narrative, has led to some renewed gesturing toward a design inference, if not explicit design 'arguments.' (Jackson, 2021; Kojonen, 2021). On occasion, appeal has even been made to the Byzantine monk and theologian St Maximus the Confessor (d.662) in the belief that his logoi cosmology is consonant with a world that bears the marks of God's design in its structure, order and pattern. The purpose of this paper is to argue that this is a misunderstanding and misappropriation of Maximus, though an instructive error, nonetheless. Contrary to some previous suggestions that the logoi are like the attractor peaks on evolutionary adaptive landscapes, (Southgate, 2008) according to Maximus, the logoi encode for all things, not just the things that look more significant to us by virtue of their order, fine-tuning or recurrence. Starting from this incarnationally panentheistic view of creation, the whole world can be seen as being derived from God (ek theou) as a free act of divine will, without the need to privilege some creatures as being more redolent of divine purpose than others. I will argue that, according to a panentheistic interpretation of Maximus, (Louth, 2004; Nesteruk, 2004; Ware, 2013; Knight, 2022) while we lose the selective divine inference, we gain a great deal more: a magnificent vision of evolution in which all things are not only exhaustively specified by the Logos but also exhaustively imbued and therefore theophanic. Though it is important for theology to 'get the science right' and highlight convergence, constraint and cooperation as important counterbalances to atheistic narratives that would stress contingency, competition and selfishness, it is equally important not to over-emphasise the former in the hope that they alone stand as positive evidence of design—at least not within a panentheistic model in which nothing is left to chance, and nothing is devoid of the immanent Logos. To do so would be to implicitly demean much of creation, the hoi polloi of insignificant creatures that have made up vast majority of created design space. The logoi ensure that nothing is wasted and nothing is left behind, no matter how ephemeral, abortive, incomplete, or transitional.

PAPER 4: Spectral Ontology and Pan(en)theism: Mapping the Nonexistent in a Scientific Cosmos

Zachary Isrow, Beacon College

ABSTRACT: This paper will explore the concept of spectricities/spectral ontology within the framework of pan(en)theism. Focusing on how latent, non-material structures influence the manifestation of beings and nonbeings in a divinely-spectral cosmos. Pan(en)theism posits that divinity is either immanent or enveloping the world, however, the ontological status of what lies beyond the material, or more importantly, between beings, is often overlooked. Drawing on the notion of spectral ontology, which categorizes not only beings but also nonbeings and hyperbeings, this paper argues that spectricities serve as the invisible matrix through which any potential divinity operates, shaping the emergence of difference along with existence without holding any materiality themselves. Through the lens of spectral ontology, the divine is not only present in tangible existence, but is rooted in the latent potentialities that enable the manifestation of any possible physical world. These spectricities act like blueprints or frameworks, and are essential to understanding how pan(en)theism allows for divine immanence in realms not traditionally recognized by scientific or materialist ontologies. They represent a middle ground between existence and non-existence, between beings and the ineffable. By interpreting divine presence through spectricities, this paper illustrates the ways that a pan(en)theistic understanding of the cosmos can be consistent with both philosophical inquiry and contemporary scientific perspectives on reality, non-materiality, and potentiality.



PAPER 5: Panentheism as a Model for the Scientific Study of Mystical Experiences [WITHDRAWN]

Sarah Runnstrom, Lund University

ABSTRACT: This paper examines whether aspects of Arthur Peacocke's panentheistic perspective can offer valuable insights into the scientific study of mystical experiences, often discussed in research on altered states of consciousness. The psychological and neurological investigation of these experiences, as well as the 'non-ordinary' states of consciousness that accompany them, has experienced a recent revival. This resurgence encompasses, but is not limited to, the exploration of deep states of meditation and altered states of awareness induced by psychoactive substances. The paper proposes that Peacocke's panentheism, when employed as a metaphorical model, may provide a useful framework for understanding states of consciousness that could be described as mystical or transcendent. In this field, researchers face the challenge of bridging the gap between scientifically observable phenomena (such as neural activity) and the subjective, often ineffable, nature of mystical experiences. This comes with a risk of either reducing these experiences to mere brain states or, conversely, preserving their subjective quality to the extent that they evade scientific scrutiny. This paper hence aims to explore whether aspects of Peacocke's panentheistic perspective can serve as a model for fostering a kind of epistemic openness and humility when approaching mystical experiences scientifically. As will be argued, such a model would allow for the possibility that mystical states of consciousness do allow access to something beyond ordinary subjective awareness, while also remaining committed to a scientific focus on cognitive mechanisms. It will be maintained that this framework can lend veridicality to the accounts of individuals, who describe their mystical experiences as having a transcendent dimension, without thereby requiring scientists to commit to a panentheistic worldview. Rather than asserting an ontological position, panentheism could, in this regard, represent the possibility that certain modes of experience provide access to aspects of consciousness not yet fully understood within current neurological research. The central question this paper seeks to address is hence whether theological concepts, when used as metaphorical or methodological models, can meaningfully contribute to the scientific study of mystical experiences. By examining the potential for such interdisciplinary dialogue, this paper will explore the extent to which panentheism can offer new avenues for both scientific inquiry and the understanding of consciousness.



New Voices Papers

The New voices papers at this conference represent highly commended submissions to the Peacocke Prize, and/or essay that the panel felt provided an excellent starting point for further discussion. Whilst not authors are able to present at this conference, all papers listed have been invited for submission to *Reviews*, so please keep an eye on future editions.

New Voices 1: Reconstructing religion's Relationship with Science: Muhammad Iqbal and varieties of sense-making

Shariq Haidery, UCL

ABSTRACT: Science is not antithetical to religion but can be included with religion as a different yet connected form of sense-making. Thereby rebuking the extreme naturalism of the new atheists who claim that there is only one form of sense-making, scientific sense-making. To the new atheists, since religion fails to be included within their extremely naturalistic outlook, religion is obsolete. My argument draws upon Muhammad Iqbal's (1887-1938) conception of Islam and has three parts. First, some remarks about the scope of my argument and Iqbal. Second, I turn to Adrian Moore's (2013) paper 'Varieties of sense-making' to show not only why scientific sense-making cannot stand alone but also the potential pitfalls for religious sense-making. Third, I depart from Moore's conception of religious sense-making, instead turning to Iqbal's conception of religious sense-making – showing Iqbal a) avoids the pitfalls that Moore outlines through crafting a conception of religion that is inclusive of, yet distinctive from, and dynamic with scientific sense-making; and b) Iqbal articulates a conception of religious sense-making that can support scientific sense-making in the areas it cannot support itself. Finally, I conclude with some closing remarks from Iqbal and myself about the relationship between philosophical sense-making and its religious and scientific variants.

New Voices 2: Autistic traits in Theology? Reflections on a Theology of Neurodiversity

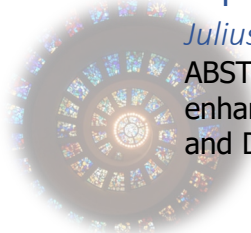
Emil Lusser, University of Vienna

ABSTRACT: The essay examines the nexus between neurodiversity studies and systematic theology, with a particular emphasis on the contributions of neurodivergent individuals to Christian theological discourse. By examining the neurodiversity paradigm, which challenges traditional medical models of disability, the paper offers a critique of conventional theological constructs. It draws attention to the discussions held by theologians such as Dirk Evers and Joanna Leidenhag concerning the implications of neurodiversity on the conceptualization of human nature, the Imago Dei, and the divine order. It then turns to an examination of Ruth Dunster's atheological approach, which is based on the perspective of an autistic person. This approach establishes a neurotribal hermeneutic that deconstructs medical accounts of autism as myth, thereby providing an existential lens for a novel understanding of both autism and theistic theology. The essay concludes by advocating for a theology that goes beyond merely discussing neurodivergence, instead incorporating the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals. It calls for a move away from the dominant pathology paradigm and toward an approach that integrates cultural, scientific, and theological perspectives on neurodiversity.

New Voices 3: Digital Theology: Digital Transformation Management to improve Church Mission-Marturia, Koinonia, and Diakonia

Julius Stefanus Sibagariang, Cipanas Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the concept of Digital Theology as a framework for enhancing the missional aspects of the Church-Marturia (witness), Koinonia (fellowship), and Diakonia (service)-through digital transformation management. In an increasingly



digitalized world, churches face the challenge of integrating technology into mission work while remaining faithful to spiritual values. This study analyzes the leveraging of digital technological developments to foster evangelism, community building, and service delivery. Through the use of a qualitative method of desk-based approach, this paper highlights how digital transformation management can empower churches to carry out mission more effectively and efficiently. Through this research, the authors found solutions to overcome digital challenges, so that digital innovations can be integrated without compromising spiritual values. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a roadmap for integrating digital technology towards the church's mission in an increasingly digitized world through digital transformation management.

New Voices 4: The Image of God and Artificial Embryos: Ought Stem-Cell-Derived Embryonic Structures be Treated as Embryonic Models or as True Embryos? [Not Presenting]

Krystal White, University of Oxford

ABSTRACT: The status of embryos as made in the image of God has drawn considerable attention over the past half-century, primarily due to the ethical implications of the image regarding abortion and embryonic research. This attention has yet to be turned to embryoids, a new development in stem cell research by which embryonic stem cells (ESCs) and/or induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) form detailed models of early stages of embryonic development when cultured in the right conditions. These embryonic "models" are being explicitly proposed as an ethical alternative to embryo research since they are not subject to the same regulations as research on human embryos. Recently a 2023 study cultivated human embryoids to 21 days of development in culture, an undertaking that would have been illegal if performed on human embryos. This research agenda presumes the non-personhood of embryoids, but such a presumption is not immediately obvious. I have therefore developed a survey of the three most common interpretations of the imago Dei, the way each interpretation defines personhood, and the way each interpretation applies such a definition to human embryos, arguing for a consistent application to human embryoids which establishes their status as the image of God and therefore as persons deserving of the right to life. This represents the first systematic analysis of the personhood of embryoids from a Christian perspective and highlights the need for further research on the ethics of embryoid research.

New Voices 5: What We Can Learn from Japanese Robotics?

Sijia Wang, University of Birmingham

ABSTRACT: This essay addresses the influence of religious beliefs on humans' attitudes towards robots. I argue that Japanese religious traditions do not automatically enable people to accept robots. Instead, it is owing to the fact that robots have been designed and used as powerful religious artefacts. Furthermore, while Western scholars have been struggling with the question of robot personhood, Japanese scholars seem to have overcome this problem. However, this cultural belief on the part of Japan is still shaped within the colonial framework which presumes that there is a substantial difference between the West and the East in cultural traditions, and that the East is a useful source for addressing problems of the West. Instead, we should recognize the subtle differences in the contexts of relations with robots which can easily be lost in translation. Though I am not intending to support technocracy, I believe that we can learn much about the design philosophy with respect to robots from their popularity in Japan. Given that both the Western and the Eastern religious traditions seem to support the use of religious artefacts as media of religious experience, we should learn from Japanese robotics regarding its practical engagement with religion and adapt it to the cultural context of the West.



New Voices 6: The Embodiment of Biology: Towards and Ontology of Life

Kieran Evans, University of Nottingham

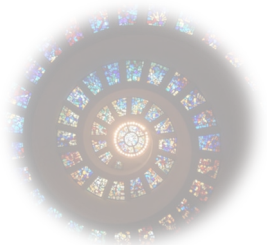
ABSTRACT: The biologist's inherent participation in living systems births the notion that "what we call life is already consciousness of life;" a preconception stemming from their lived embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 184). This paper shows that existence instils a latent ontology of life into the work of the biologist. The inherent rooting of biological 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 explores how Merleau-Ponty's ontology 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 – a theological act. 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, we can see that biology's concept is painted in experience, embodiment, and life itself.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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