

## The Ontologies of Science and Religion

Science and religion are complex cultural phenomena, which bear on our understanding of the world, life, consciousness, agency, morality, as well as all other fundamental issues human beings puzzle over. There exists a longstanding question about whether science and religion, and the responses they offer to these issues, are complementary or in conflict.

The conflict narrative, championed for example by the New Atheists, emphasizes discrepancies between scientific and religious explanations and typically advances methodological, ethical, and ontological naturalism as providing us with the only adequate means of addressing the big questions humanity faces.

The complementarity narrative, without denying the advances of the natural sciences, tends to take the view that it is possible to retain elements of a religious worldview alongside the discoveries of natural science. A traditional focus in the European context has been on the viability of certain ethical ideas whose original justification was arguably based in Christianity, such as human dignity, moral equality, and the centrality of humility, compassion and sacrifice.

Another focus has been on whether putatively Christian conceptions of love as ideally unconditional and selfless are justifiable within a non-religious framework. A third focus has been on whether art has a role to play as a substitute or successor to religion, either through imparting some special form of knowledge, or as a means of inculcating moral and cultural values more generally. By contrast the Anglo-American tradition has tended to consider the metaphysical implications of naturalism for the religious world view. Some of the important questions addressed in this strand of the debate include whether the universe is causally closed, and if so whether this is compatible with the existence of supernatural phenomena such as immaterial souls or divine intervention.

One of the striking features of this debate is that it divides thinkers in unexpected and unfamiliar ways. Some religious thinkers argued that valuable aspects of religious life are inseparable from belief, and have thus been led to conclude that belief remains indispensable. Others have held that religion can bequeath precious

ideals and practices to secular culture. Non-religious thinkers may think that the persistence of religiously influenced ways of life in the absence of belief is invidious, or that this would be desirable but is impossible to maintain, or that it is both possible, and an important objective. These distinctions disrupt standard categorizations of thinkers into pro- and anti-religion camps.

The papers comprising the thematic section of this first of two issues devoted to science and religion pose three different challenges to scientific naturalism – the doctrine that the methodology of the natural sciences limits the scope of possible enquiry to physical, or material phenomena. In the opening paper, “God and Some Limits of Science”, Stephen Priest examines several fundamental questions, which we cannot address by appealing to the methodology of the natural sciences. The analysis of these questions shows that there are at least two types of limit to scientific explanation: subjective and objective.

Science, Priest argues, on the one hand, cannot address questions which pertain to our subjective experience of reality like Why is anything you? Is there free will? Is death the end? On the other hand there are questions that are too general, or too macroscopic, and so lie beyond what science can investigate. These include Why is there a universe? Why is there anything? What is it to be? There is however, according to Priest, a third set of questions, which combine, or include, both subjective and objective aspects: What is consciousness? Why is there such a time as the present? Why is there any distinction between right and wrong? Priest shows that traditional Newtonian-Einsteinian physics brackets these questions while quantum physics shows them to be fundamental to our understanding of reality. Addressing each of these questions, Priest argues, entails the existence of some reality with several of the properties of God. In the final part of his paper Priest formalizes these entailments and offers several arguments for the existence of God, that follow from the limits of science. Priest's paper is a summary of an unpublished book manuscript, *Cosmic Questions*.

In the second paper, “De-Conditioning and the scientific image of the mind”, Joshua Farris analyses the categorical framework adopted by Stephen Priest and which he develops in detail in his paper “The Unconditioned Soul.”<sup>1</sup> Farris investigates the viability and explanatory power of Priest's conception of the “conditioned” and the “unconditioned” modes of thought. He explores a range of historical and contemporary examples of the “conditioned” especially in the form they take in recent naturalistic approaches to consciousness both in philosophy and science. Farris identifies several limitations of these views and discusses examples of “de-conditioning” of the current discourse concerning the mind, which open the door to an “unconditioned” understanding of the nature of consciousness and its place in nature.

Farris goes on to argue that in more recent in analytic philosophy of mind there is a new trend that is in line with Priest's postulate of deconditioning the discourse, and which embraces the unconditioned approach to metaphysics and theology which Priest argues for. Farris ends his piece with several examples of this in the ongoing debate on the relationship between science and religion. He includes in this selection his own contribution *The Creation of Self: A Case for the Soul*<sup>2</sup> in which he argues that the deconditioning of our uncritically adopted modes of thought requires the sacrifice of our basic intuitions about consciousness, selves, and minds. This sacrifice, however, leads us, according to Farris, to accept theism as the most viable metaphysical position, which has the greatest explanatory power. The issue, Farris concludes, is not with the argument in support of this position, but with the fact that some are simply not willing to accept its conclusion.

The final essay in the thematic section “More Substance, Please: A Reply To Michael Esfeld's Minimalist Ontology of Persons” by Alin Cucu Michael engages with Esfeld's recent attempt to reconcile freedom and irre-

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1) Stephen Priest, “The Unconditioned Soul,” In *After Physicalism*, ed. Benedikt Paul Gocke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

2) Joshua Farris, *The Creation of Self: A Case for the Soul* (Washington: Iff Books, 2023).

ducible personhood with scientific realism while remaining committed to minimal ontological assumptions. Cucu begins by presenting Esfeld's conception of persons and its grounding in naturalistic ontology. Cucu criticizes Esfeld's premature rejection of mind-body dualism and finds his picture too minimalistic to support a robust picture of the human person. He then gives an argument in favor of mind-body dualism by showing how its non-classical version can avoid the problems Esfeld identifies.

Cucu questions the two basic assumptions of Esfeld's ontology: Super-Humeanism and *Completeness*. He suggests that Esfeld's idea that persons can create themselves by adopting a normative attitude is an unsatisfactory account of the emergence of personhood as ultimately it either collapses into a reductionist account or requires a richer underlying ontology than Esfeld is prepared to grant. Cucu accepts Esfeld's ontology of the natural world but argues that if this ontology is to include a robust account of persons it requires expanding to include a theistic worldview.

The Forum section contains two papers. Przemysław Bursztyka's "Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe: Toward a Common Ethos", and Niko Popow's "Movenglish: Dance as Sign System". Bursztyka's paper explores the nature and character of Eastern European identity. He begins by making the poignant observation that the idea of Eastern Europe has to date had mostly negative connotations. Bursztyka argues that there is a need for a non-reductive account of Eastern Europe account which appeals to foundational modes of experience rather than presupposed theoretical frameworks, sets of explanatory concepts or a particular scientific paradigm. Bursztyka proceeds by first criticizing existing conceptualization of Eastern Europe as colonialist and post-colonialist in their origin. Second, he proposes a new cultural geography of Eastern Europe. Finally Bursztyka argues that this cultural geography is characterized by a specifically determined way of living, experiencing, and self-understanding. He identifies these qualities with an ethos that unites the region and determines its most fundamental features as a diversified community.

In his paper Popow investigates whether dance can convey meaning. He rejects two deep seated convictions he identifies in philosophical discourse on the topic: firstly that meaning is an all-or-nothing question, and secondly that if dance is to have meaning it will be a non-discursive meaning. The rejection of this second assumption opens the way for Popow to defend a novel view according to which the choreographic language of dance can convey meaning in exactly the same way that discursive representations such as written language do. Popow argues for this position by examining the "movenglish" dance practice of Charly and Eriel Santagado. In his conclusion he asserts that although dance is not reliant for its intelligibility on the display of written or spoken words it may nonetheless can convey the sort of meaning that written or spoken words transmit in a way that makes certain aspects of that meaning more salient.

The issue finishes with two discussion papers. Both papers are on topics in philosophical aesthetics. In the first paper "Aesthetic Judgment, Embodied Rationality, and the Truth of Appearances: An Introduction to Roger Scruton's Philosophical Anthropology" Paul Wilford and Eryn Rozonoyer offer an interpretation of and introduction to the philosophical anthropology of Roger Scruton. The authors argue that the aesthetic dimension of human rationality is at the heart of Scruton's anthropology. The paper shows how Scruton's anthropology may be understood as a corrective to the contemporary scientific naturalism. Wilford and Rozonoyer consider of how embodied rationality is at work in four different forms of art—painting, music, dance, and architecture. The paper builds on Scruton's philosophical anthropology, and advances a normative claim about the importance of art and beauty to human life. The final paper in the issue is Jan Defrančeski's review of Timothy Morton's "All Art is Ecological". Defrančeski offers a thoughtful examination of Morton's position and a critical analysis of his arguments.



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