



Logos et scientia

Center for the Study of the Relationship between Science and Religion

Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Zagreb

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ABSTRACT BOOK

FIRST CePOZiR CONFERENCE – 2025

Zagreb, September 24-26, 2025

EDITORS

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Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb
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¹ All oral presentations

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The editors have revised the book, fixing obvious errors, but cannot be held responsible for potential grammatical or spelling mistakes in the abstracts. This responsibility lies with the authors.

FOREWORD

You are holding in your hand the Abstract Book of the First CePOZiR Conference – 2025, organized by the Center for the Study of the Relationship between Science and Religion at the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb. This is the first in the envisioned series of Conferences by the Center. Covering three main sections – *The Relationship between Science and Religion* (of interest to the Center), *Religion and Society* (of interest to the Faculty), and *Science and Society* (of interest to the University) – the Conference aims to gather outstanding intellectuals from Croatia and abroad to encourage reflection on key topics unified by a common theme. This year's theme is *Exploring Research Directions*, and it allowed us to present three keynote addresses from renowned global experts, nine invited lectures, and 38 contributed presentations from professionals in 15 countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Israel, Italy, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and USA) across various academic disciplines, from humanistic to natural sciences. These scholars aim to reflect on topics within the sections mentioned above, deepening existing dilemmas, raising new questions, providing intellectual engagement for attendees, and inspiring them to reflect on their own work.

Having said all that, it is worth recalling that the philosophy exploring the relationship between science and religion is a dynamic field, despite – or precisely because of – its status as a relatively young discipline that gained initial momentum only in the mid-20th century. Therefore, further development is entirely foreseeable. At the same time, this should come as no surprise, since learned philosophical inquiry is essential for a comprehensive academic approach that seeks to understand both mankind and society, along with their mysteries. In this context, this Conference aims to facilitate academic exchanges that remain difficult for some to achieve, despite clear overlaps and intersections. We want to connect natural scientists with theologians, at least through initial mediation by philosophers (how else?). Moreover, we aspire to encourage joint reflections that compel them to address the most complex and unresolved academic questions, such as the origins of the Universe, the emergence of life, or the advent of human consciousness ...

Are we too ambitious? Yes. However, this should not worry us excessively, but rather motivate us, based on the fundamental assumption that throughout this entire endeavor, we must not abandon academic principles at any cost. Only by doing so can we keep engaging in philosophical ponderings about the relationship between science and religion and other core topics that the Conference offers within the framework of common sense, which is so necessary in our current age, often called the age of post-truth. Therefore, we will conclude this brief address with a biblical quote: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of holiness is prudence* (Proverbs, 9:10).

Branko Murić (a theologian) &
Petar Tomev Mitrikeski (a natural scientist)

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

KEYNOTE LECTURE ONE

Cosmologia as the Bridge to Reunite Science and Theology

Piero Benvenuti

University of Padova, ITALY



The most remarkable novelty of the modern cosmological model is undoubtedly the evolutionary character of the universe. Beyond its great scientific relevance, the fact that the entire reality is evolving has profound philosophical and theological implications. Following a suggestion by the cosmologist George F. Ellis, it seems timely and appropriate to recover the historical concept of a global *Cosmologia*, which, stemming from a consolidated scientific *Cosmology*, encompasses and proposes a philosophical and theological interpretation of the entire reality, material and spiritual. This approach presents several advantages. First, it forever dispels the historical pseudo-conflict between science and theology, because the former will be forced to stop its deductions beyond the applicability of the scientific method, and the latter can no longer ignore the consolidated rational modelling of the experimental reality. Second, by recognizing the essential evolutionary character of reality, Christian theology can most naturally recover the Aquinas concept of *Creatio continua*, as an a-temporal relation between the Creator and its creation (matter and spirit). As a corollary, in the evolutionary scenario, the sharp separation between matter and spirit appears more and more artificial and calls for a profound rethinking along the seminal paths of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Finally, the desirable emerging *Cosmologia* seems the most promising basis for initiating a modern eschatological discourse.

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SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

INVITED SPEAKER ONE

Philosophical and Scientific Elements in the Byzantine Accounts of Creation

Ivan Vasilev Christov (Иван Василев Христов)

Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Theology, BULGARIA



The paper will examine the place of philosophical and scientific discourse in a specifically theological genre, such as the *Hexaemeron*. An answer to a series of interrelated questions will be sought: Does the integration of concepts from physics, biology, astronomy, and geography in it mean a striving for encyclopedism? Is their presence there an end in itself? If not, does theology build on positive knowledge? In what way is science integrated into the apophatic discourse of the Fathers? What is the relationship between intellectual and spiritual contemplation? Is theology in the *Hexaemeron* rational, and what is its relationship to the mystical theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church?

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

INVITED SPEAKER TWO

Re-examining the Compatibility of Evolution and Design Arguments

Erkki Vesa Rope Kojonen

University of Helsinki, FINLAND



Could evolution and biological design arguments be compatible after all? It has often been argued that there is a conflict between evolution and seeing any divine purpose in the biological world. Darwin himself struggled with the issue, saying that sometimes the intuition of design 'comes over me with overwhelming force' but at other times 'it seems to go away.' In modern debates, many defenders of design arguments have opted to argue against evolution. Instead, this lecture develops a philosophical *evolutionary design argument*, updating the ideas of 19th-century biologist Asa Gray based on current science and philosophy. This challenges the dichotomy of evolution and design as opposing explanations, thereby undermining both Intelligent Design arguments (insofar as they require gaps in evolutionary processes) and atheistic philosophical interpretations of evolution, which assert that evolution is purposeless and unguided. The lecture also considers and responds to four objections to evolutionary design arguments, including (1) the logical compatibility of evolution and design, (2) the principle of simplicity, (3) the role of chance in evolution, and (4) potential unfalsifiability. Evolutionary design arguments provide an interesting case study of the relationship between theistic and scientific explanations.

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SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

INVITED SPEAKER THREE

Science and Religion from the Western and Eastern Christian Perspective

Tereza Obolevich

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, POLAND



The paper explores the relationship between science and religion from Western and Eastern Christian perspectives, highlighting their distinct approaches. In the West, scholars emphasize methodological naturalism, viewing science and religion as autonomous domains, with science maintaining neutrality toward religion due to its empirical limits. Conversely, Eastern Christian thinkers prioritize the metaphysical interdependence of faith and science, arguing that nature, as God's creation, is inherently tied to theology. This comparative analysis underscores the potential for mutual enrichment between these perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of faith, science, and the human condition.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

The Relationship between the Science *Peri Phýseos* and Religion in The Early Greek Philosophy

Ivana Knežić

University of Zadar, CROATIA



The presentation aims at the elucidation of the nature of the relationship between the science *peri phýseos* and religion in the early Greek philosophy. In order to understand adequately the nature of this relationship, it is necessary first to grasp the true character of the science *peri phýseos*. For this reason, the presentation starts with the examination of the meaning of the central term of that science – the term *phýsis*. After that, the witnesses about the lives and teachings of pre-Socratics, together with the fragments regarding their attitudes on the existence and nature of God/gods, deity, and religion, shall be carefully analyzed. As a conclusion, it will be shown that although the engagement in the science *peri phýseos* entailed the disavowal of some popular opinions regarding the nature of gods, it did not result in the rejection of the religious beliefs altogether, but gave rise to their purification.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

The Emergence of the Scientific Method within the Paradigm of Christianity

Luka Popov

Zagreb, CROATIA



It is a historical fact that the modern scientific method emerged in medieval Europe, within the Christian paradigm. But why did this happen? Why didn't it emerge in the advanced civilizations of China or Islam, which were equally technologically developed compared to Christian Europe? Is it merely a historical coincidence, or is there a deeper explanation for why the modern scientific paradigm emerged under the strong influence of Christianity? In this lecture, I will address and hopefully answer some of these questions.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

A Non-Materialist Metaphysical Paradigm at The Interface of Science and Religion

Finley Issac Lawson

Canterbury Christ Church University, UNITED KINGDOM



The narrative that places science against religion resides in the perception that a “scientific” reality has no space for the immaterial/transcendental. This perceived dichotomy, resides in a categorical error about the nature and number of things in reality. In contrast, the scientific holistic ontology proposed by Hans Primas (quantum chemist) provides a radically different account of foundational reality where there is no requirement to reconcile two fundamentally different kinds of “stuff”. Primas’ metaphysics consists of an unbroken mind-matter unity, which requires the scientist and theologian alike to make a distinction between “scientific” metaphysics and “global metaphysics”. Primas has a deep commitment to a nonmaterial realm and a recognition that we must not mistake the Cartesian “fiction” for an ontological reality. This paper examines how scientific holism challenges our theological and philosophical accounts of human nature and reality considers the implications of holistic metaphysics for the distinction and uniqueness of persons.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Evidence in Science and Evidence in Religion

Marko Grba

University of Rijeka, CROATIA



Nowadays, it goes without saying that scientific fields hold all the evidential basis for judgment, whereas religious thought/belief is to be banished from scientific endeavor or philosophy. Indeed, many a scientist or philosopher of science will not only tacitly agree but openly promote such attitudes (just think of the likes of Richard Dawkins and the so-called new atheists). Yet, the type of evidence that such widely differing fields of knowledge provide is rarely assessed comparatively by either the scientists or philosophers, especially of analytical provenance (notable exceptions being John Lennox or James Tour, to mention some of the most famous names). And then there is the growing clamor of what amounts to a two-prong attack on science and religion by the proponents of the so-called woke ideology. The time is ripe for a reassessment of various types of evidence as offered by the aforementioned fields.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Mirko Danijel Bogdanić and Catholic Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy

Vlatko Smiljanić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies, CROATIA



Mirko Danijel Bogdanić (Virovitica, Croatia, 1760 – Buda, Hungary, 1802) was one of the most prominent Croatian natural scientists of the 18th century, whose work reflects the interaction between faith and reason within the Catholic Enlightenment. Unlike secular Enlightenment movements, the Catholic Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy sought to harmonize scientific progress with religious teachings. Bogdanić contributed to astronomy, mathematics, and cartography, disciplines crucial for state administration and military strategy. His involvement in astronomical-cartographic expeditions and the development of geographic maps underscores the practical application of science in governance. Additionally, his initiative to publish Croatia's first pre-revival newspaper demonstrates his commitment to disseminating knowledge in the vernacular. His career, shaped by Jesuit, Franciscan, and Piarist intellectual circles, illustrates how scientific and theological perspectives coexisted. This presentation explores Bogdanić's role within the Catholic Enlightenment, highlighting the complex relationship between science and religion in early modern Central Europe and reassessing the significance of faith in shaping scientific thought.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

A Relationship between Science and Religion According to Arnold Benz

Roman Brajša

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Geodesy, Hvar Observatory, CROATIA



In a series of books and essays, Arnold Benz describes a complex relationship between science and religion. His approach begins with two important points. The first is wonder, which is common to both science and religion, albeit at different levels. The second is the principle that science and religion experience reality in different ways that complement each other. He emphasizes hope for a new Creation exemplified in Christianity with the pattern of transition from the chaos of Good Friday to the resurrection of Jesus at Easter. Furthermore, the universe is perceived as a gift from God, and reality is comprehended on three different levels: Explaining, Understanding, and Interpreting. These ideas are described and extended/compared with some philosophical concepts of L. Wittgenstein, the theory of change of P. Watzlawick et al., and the theory of the strange loop of D. Hofstadter.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Theosis and individuation: A link between Christianity and psychology

Momir Oljača

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, CROATIA



The doctrine of *theosis* undoubtedly occupies a central place in the Christian mystery, yet in Catholicism, it has remained insufficiently emphasized and developed to this day. In Carl Jung's analytical psychology, we find a closely related concept, recognized as an organic process of growth and development aimed at the wholeness of the personality. This "process of individuation," as Jung called it, is not controlled by the individual—it occurs involuntarily and is guided by an autonomous force that Jung identified as the archetype of the Self, or "the archetype of the image of God in man." In this presentation, we aim to briefly outline and compare the Christian concept of *theosis* and Jung's concept of individuation. We are deeply convinced that Jungian psychology offers Christianity the essential knowledge it needs to overcome the spiritual crisis it currently faces: an understanding of the human *psyche*, or the soul.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Order and Contingency – The Fruitfulness of Divine Wisdom

Josipa Nemet

Ruđer Bošković Institute, Department of Molecular Biology, CROATIA



Lecture explores the harmony between the deep order of the universe and the freedom essential to evolutionary creation. The consistent structure of physical laws and subatomic matter forms a stable foundation for life's emergence. Yet within this order, randomness and variation – manifested in genetic mutations and large population dynamics – play a vital role. Rather than indicating chaos, these elements reflect a kind of created freedom: space within which novelty can arise. Drawing on the work of Simon Conway Morris and others on evolutionary convergence, we can observe how similar biological solutions emerge independently, suggesting that evolution is not aimless but guided by the fruitful potential built into creation. Randomness, then, is not opposed to purpose but serves it – enabling a dynamic, open-ended process through which life explores possibilities within the bounds of order. Evolution becomes a drama of freedom grounded in law, variation shaped by direction, and fruitfulness arising from the interplay of chance and intelligibility.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Science, Truth, and the Victim: A Comparative Analysis of Nietzsche and Girard

Marijana Bijelić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, CROATIA



This paper compares Friedrich Nietzsche's and René Girard's views on truth, with a focus on their diverging interpretations of the relationship between truth, the victim, and science. Nietzsche conceives truth as a cultural construct that sustains metaphysical and moral illusions. The demand for truth is perverted into the opposite of the *will to power*: a moral demand for objectivity, detachment, and disinterestedness. This demand, Nietzsche argues, reflects a form of self-denial and decadence, inherited in Christianity. The pursuit of truth becomes a tool of *ressentiment*, turning against life, illusion, and the affective richness of existence. In contrast, Girard affirms the ethical value of truth precisely based on the victim's pathos. His theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism reveals how cultures obscure collective violence through myth. The Judeo-Christian tradition, culminating in the Gospel's defense of the innocent victim, initiates a radical demystification and ethical imperative toward truth.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

The Dialogue between Theology and Science as a Sincere Search for Truth. Between Scientific Experiment and Religious

Ilche Micevski-Ignat (Илче Мицевски-Игнат)

*Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, St. Clement of Ohrid Faculty
of Orthodox Theology in Skopje, NORTH MACEDONIA*



The search for truth is a very old preoccupation, since ancient times. Ancient philosophers and sages were engaged in it. The search for truth has not stopped, but continues to this day. We can say that the greatest seekers of truth today are scientists, in all areas of scientific research. On the other hand, there are theologians who know Who is the Truth (John 14:6), trying to be in communion with the truth through spiritual life. The path to truth can be found, but the methods are different because science and theology use different approaches. Science uses observation and experimentation of the things it wants to know, and theology uses the centuries-old spiritual experience gained in the life of the Church. Although the methods seem different, the goal seems to be the same, and that is to find the answers that lead humanity to the knowledge of the truth.

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SECTION ONE | The Relationship between Science and Religion

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATION

Faith as an Epistemic Tool

Petar Tomev Mitrikeski

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, CROATIA



The human mind (νοῦς) encompasses reason (λόγος), faith (πίστις), and emotions that are interlinked and inseparable. Reason additionally serves as the foundation for discursive thinking (διάνοια), without which our cognition would rely entirely on intuitive understanding. Thus, reason empowers us to comprehend the world, which can also be contemplated spiritually and felt (internalized) emotionally (e.g., through fine art aesthetics). In both philosophy and science, we rely on our rational abilities while overlooking faith. However, faith is essential for fostering trust in God, whose sacred revelations are interpreted through both reasoning and faith, ultimately resulting in knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Given that the biblical narrative often highlights faith over reasoning (e.g., John 9:35; Mark 9:23; Mark 9:24; Luke 7:50, 10:21; Matthew 15:28; Matthew 8:10; 1 Cor 1:19), while never neglecting prudence (*prudentia*) (e.g., Prov 3:5, 8:12), it is important to acknowledge epistemic value to faith. This leads to the crucial question: *Does our epistemic perspective shift based on whether we adopt a top-down (where reason relies on faith) or bottom-up (where faith depends on reason) epistemic path?*

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

KEYNOTE LECTURE TWO

What society? What science? What religion?

Nikolaos Loudovikos (Π. ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΛΟΥΔΟΒΙΚΟΣ)

University of Ioannina, GREECE



This paper will strive to answer questions such as the following:

Concerning Society: Which is the role of a possible ontology of human nature, after the collapse of any possible normative function of the concept of human nature, which function could produce commonly acceptable social institutions? What are the possible criteria of a contemporary social ethics after the collapse of virtue ethics (due to the postmodern rejection of any common sources of meaning, either natural or Biblical), leading to what can be called an “ethics of taste”, today?

Concerning Science: Is it possible for science to overcome the Heideggerian submission of it to Technology, and open itself to a contemplative perspective not alien to the possibility of metaphysical intuitions? What is the future of the human sciences?

Concerning Religion: Is it possible to overcome the temptation of any ecstatic/escapist use of religion? Is it possible to understand that Christianity is something absolutely more than a religion? Is it possible to go beyond expiation, justification, and atonement, and see Incarnation in a fundamentally ontological way?

The answer to the above questions will show if it is possible for us to use modern science in a non-self-destructive way.

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SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

INVITED SPEAKER FOUR

Are We a Scientific or Fideistic Society?

Luciana Dini

*Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Biology and Biotechnology
"Charles Darwin", ITALY*



To answer this question, one would have to be very competent in both the scientific and the fideistic/theological fields. Now, if in the former I have years of experience that have evolved and been consolidated in the field, in the latter I feel like an amateur. In a very short time, we have witnessed great discoveries in both physics and biology (think DNA) that, as a natural counterbalance, have reinvigorated the never-dormant need for a creative intelligence, or God. Will the introduction of AI into our daily lives succeed in being seen as the new creator God? In my dissertation, I will highlight the scientific approach that a researcher must have for his or her work, and will compare it with a fideistic approach. The possibilities of convergence or divergence in social, ethical, and moral approaches between science and religion will be discussed.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

INVITED SPEAKER FIVE

Morality as Based on Religion

Srećko Kovač

Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, CROATIA



"European values" are often understood as predominantly secular and as originating from the Enlightenment. Drawing upon Kant's philosophical conception of the Enlightenment, we argue that secularism does not provide an adequate foundation for morality. We show that Kantian theory and reflections consistently lead to the conclusion that the ideas of God and immortality transcend the role of mere practical postulates, acquiring the status of ontological facts – thus departing from his commonly adopted philosophical position. This claim is understood in three ways: as an explanation for the possibility of achieving happiness alongside the pursuit of morality, as the grounding for respect toward the moral law, and as a framework for conceptualizing moral values consistently and systematically. Moreover, the historical roots of European society testify to Christianity as the formative basis of European culture and its values. This argument will be illustrated by examining examples from Croatian epigraphic inscriptions.

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SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

INVITED SPEAKER SIX

The Concept of Deep Incarnation in the Dialogue between Science and Religion

Niels Henrik Gregersen

University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Theology, DENMARK



"The Word of God became flesh (*sarx*) and dwelled amongst us" says John 1:14. The concept of deep incarnation views Christ as conjoined with the world of creation – from humans, animals, and microbiotic lifeforms to the abiotic world of stones, dust, and dirt. Relating the incarnate God to the whole world of creation offers the possibility of relating Christ and Spirit to a variety of interactions between theology and science, especially the problem of evolutionary suffering and ecology. The paper will present the idea in outline, point to its receptions, and respond to some of its critics.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Rationality of the Act of Faith According to John Henry Newman

Maja Poljak

University of Zadar, CROATIA



Newman is widely recognized as one of the most influential thinkers of 19th-century England, who dedicated his work to the understanding and promulgation of Christian faith during a time when rationalism in religion and skeptical tendencies were infiltrating the philosophical landscape of the day. Prominent Newman scholars agree on the fact that one of the weapons he used in his fight against skepticism was his constant reference to human nature and the natural laws that govern it. The presentation aims to research Newman's understanding of human rationality and how it relates to faith, understood not just in the religious meaning of the word, but faith seen as a rational cognitive act that is used in all areas of human cognitive life, ranging from everyday life to scientific research.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Acting from Faith and the Scientific-Technological Paradigm Based on the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*

Nikola Vranješ

University of Zagreb, Catholic Faculty of Theology, CROATIA



The 60th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council should be a new incentive for Christians to reflect on their understanding of faith and acting from faith. Deepening their understanding of faith and the permanent improvement of their actions from faith are inextricably linked to their knowledge and practice of relations with scientific and technological reality. In this sense, the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is an indispensable source of encouragement for deeper understanding and correct action. Based on the impetus of this constitution, several theological-pastoral topics are distinguished in this presentation. Their discernment shows the importance of dealing with the scientific-technological paradigm for the practice of faith. The topics explored here are the correct image of God, a suitable image of man and the world, the theme of maturing in faith, the meaning of the concepts of a dynamic-evolutionary vision of the world for life in faith, the meaning of the reality of culture and changes in pastoral care, and the purification of religious practice, and especially popular piety from mythological elements and elements of superstition and some other related distortions of practice.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Living Faith Authentically: between Inner Truth and Unconscious Motives

Antun Volenik & Andrija Piskać

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, CROATIA



In an era of fragmented identities and growing spiritual pursuit, the concept of authenticity increasingly emerges within religious experience. This paper explores the relationship between the psychological notion of the authentic self and lived faith, focusing on how religiosity can either reflect inner freedom or unconscious defense mechanisms such as shame, guilt, or the need for belonging. Drawing from identity development theory, the concepts of true and false self, and object relations theory, the paper examines conditions under which faith becomes an authentic response to the transcendent. Special attention is given to distinguishing healthy spiritual searching from religiosity rooted in unresolved psychological issues. The aim is to provide criteria for discerning authentic faith from faith used as an escape from the self, and to highlight the importance of spiritual maturity in the holistic development of the person.

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SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

From Truth to Counterfeit

Hrvoj Vančik

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science, CROATIA



The concept of truth is one of the central categories in science, art, and religion. The emergence of fake theories and the replacement of the works of fine art with the superficial and banal structures is becoming one of the most recognizable contents in public media. In this presentation, I argue that counterfeit in science and art does not originate only within popular communications, but has its roots in the specific manipulations of the scientific epistemology. Specifically, philosophical constructions such as empirical constructivism and deflationism are imagined for the deconstruction of the requirement for ontological truth. Similarly, trivialism is devaluing art. If similar trends also exist in religion, perhaps the transformation of religion to ideology supported by pseudo-science, then science, religion, and serious art have to work together on the way to re-establish the system of values.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION TWO | Religion and Society

CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Comparative Theology and Technology (AI) – A Possible Methodological Approach?

Sava Raitchev Kokoudev (Щони Райчев Кокудев)

Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, BULGARIA



The presentation will propose a methodological approach to the application of computer sciences, with a particular focus on big data, neural networks, and artificial intelligence, in the research field of comparative theology. The merits of this approach lie in its potential to contribute to the homogenization and structural definition of comparative models, which frequently remain partial and distant in their contextualization and content analysis. The methodological relevance should be provided by a pliable intermediate that is convenient for building a conceptual network model. This model could eventually define homogeneous prototypes of theological constructions that participate in different models existing in reality and are practically subject to comparative analysis.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

When Did Salvation Become Digital? Cybergnosticism and the Scientific Reimagining of Religious Transcendence

Mikolaj Martinjak

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, CROATIA



This paper examines the emergence of Cybergnosticism – a contemporary phenomenon where digital technologies are increasingly positioned as pathways to transcendence traditionally promised by religious systems. Through analysis of both theoretical discourse, cultural artifacts and transhumanist manifestos, the paper demonstrates how the ancient Gnostic quest for liberation through special knowledge has been scientifically reimagined for the digital age. This transformation raises critical questions about the demarcation between scientific advancement and pseudo-religious promise: When do technological aspirations cross into religious territory? And why has the ancient heresy of Gnosticism found such fertile ground in ostensibly secular technological discourse? By exploring these questions, this paper argues that Cybergnosticism as a system represents not merely technological evolution but the emergence of a hybrid knowledge system that strategically blurs the boundaries between scientific rationality and religious soteriology, creating new challenges for both scientific integrity and religious authenticity in our "post-truth" era.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Abandoning a Body to Enter Eternity: The Metaphysical Design of Posthumanism

Odilon-Gbènoukpo Singbo

Catholic University of Croatia, CROATIA



Strange as it may seem, modern technological development carries a spiritual and metaphysical agenda. The main techno-progressive themes, reinforced by artificial intelligence, aim to transgress natural limits to achieve an indefinite life. Extropians herald a posthumanism whose essential characteristics are manifested through perpetual progress, self-transformation, and the transcendence of nature through intelligent technologies. In this sense, certain stages toward “eternity” are defined, the first step of which is the noosphere. The abandonment of the body, biological and digital immortality, remains the main goal. Faced with these promises, the genius of Christianity as an antithesis of disembodied eternity should be useful. The longing for eternity is always conditioned by the experience of finitude, the fulfillment of which does not depend on finite man, but on God. Therefore, the experience and hope of eternity include the acceptance of our constitutive vulnerability and our humanizing limits. The exponential development of technology and its ideological use demand a demarcation from the noospheric fantasies of posthumanism.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Tradition and Transformation: Modern Vedāntic Responses to Science

Ivan Andrijanić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, CROATIA



With the advent of science and technology in India, responses emerged in relation to the country's religious traditions. This presentation examines svāmin Vivekānanda (1863–1902) and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), both of whom interpret the relationship between science and religion through Vedāntic philosophy. Each adopts a holistic and integrative approach. Vivekānanda portrays Hinduism as epistemologically compatible with science, offering a form of universal experiential verification through *samādhi*, achieved via yoga. Radhakrishnan similarly emphasises experience, but advances a more nuanced framework in which science and religion are distinct yet interrelated domains of a shared reality. Drawing on the Vedāntic model of two-level truth, he sees both as contributing to a unified vision, while opening more space to intuition and its relation to rational inquiry. The presentation explores how faithfully these models reflect classical Vedāntic sources, and to what extent they embody modern reinterpretations shaped by colonial and reformist contexts.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Conceptualizing Islam and Science: Perspectives from University-Educated Individuals in a Muslim Majority Context

Khaled Meghnine

University of Helsinki, FINLAND



In Muslim-majority contexts, religion profoundly shapes public life, including perceptions of science. However, empirical research on the interaction between science and religion in these contexts remains underdeveloped. The paper examines how university-educated individuals in Algeria integrate religious and scientific explanations when interpreting natural phenomena. Specifically, it presents findings from twelve exploratory interviews, revealing diverse conceptualizations of science and religion and highlighting the role of social influences in shaping these views within a cultural setting often perceived as homogeneous. The paper builds on the recent discussions in the cognitive science of religion regarding explanatory coexistence. By applying and extending these discussions to the understudied Algerian context, this research contributes to a broader understanding of science-religion engagement in Muslim-majority societies.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Art, Science, and Faith in the Works of Dante Alighieri

Ante Belić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, CROATIA



Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* masterfully intertwines art, science, and faith into a coherent spiritual vision. Through vivid allegory and rich symbolism, his poetry becomes a visual, moral guide. Scientific concepts like Ptolemaic cosmology, geometry, optics, and the physics of reflection structure *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, giving cosmic and moral order to his journey. Faith lies at the core: the guides – Virgil (reason), Beatrice (faith), and Bernard (mystical devotion) – embody a path from human understanding to divine union. Dante thus achieves a timeless synthesis: art as expressive medium, science as structural framework, and faith as ultimate purpose, guiding the soul toward truth and transcendence.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

God and the Purpose of Pain

Victoria Campbell

Global Methodist Church, USA



For many people, pain is an obstacle to belief in the loving God of the Bible. While the U.S. National Academy of Sciences has concluded that evidence for the experience of pain is limited to mammals and birds, and pain is a necessary warning system for long-lived intelligent creatures, one can still be left wondering why a benevolent God would create a world with suffering in it. This is where the command of Jesus to “love your neighbor as yourself” will be considered in conjunction with the *brain opioid theory of social attachment*, which shows that the perception of pain in humans, birds, and other mammals is mitigated by the presence of empathetic love. Ultimately, God has created a beautiful world filled with his providential care in order that the children of God, who love one another even when costly, may be revealed (Romans 8:19-22).

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Contemplative Prayer and Physical Health: A Literature Review

Kristina Fišter

University of Zagreb, School of Medicine, CROATIA



Contemplative prayer (CP) has been shown to favorably impact practitioners' psychology and spirituality, with benefits extending to religions beyond Christianity, even to atheism, and to different contexts, from the ordained through secular leaders to the general population, including war veterans and those struggling to keep inner peace at times of threatening or ongoing conflicts. CP has been proposed as a proactive method to help address the observed and as yet unrecognized mental health and spiritual issues of "digital natives", modern young generations living in the digital age and coexisting with artificial intelligence. The association between CP and physical health has received less attention. From inception to 30th March 2025, databases PubMed, Web of Science, and Scopus comprised 314 studies mentioning the phrase "contemplative prayer". Here, we include and synthesize 16 articles that addressed physical health. Results support further investigation of CP as relevant for physical health in medical research.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

A Microbiological Hypothesis on the Nature of Healing Soils and Holy Waters

Gerry Quinn

Ulster University, UNITED KINGDOM



Sacred soils and holy waters are rarely randomly designated; instead, they occur in areas with distinct biogeochemical traits, such as karst landscapes and unique mineral profiles, which often have deep ties to indigenous cultural practices, like those at Santuario de Chimayó in New Mexico or in Boho, Northern Ireland. Remarkably, these sites frequently harbour *Streptomyces*, a soil bacterium producing numerous antibiotic, anticancer, antiviral, antiparasitic, and other bioactive compounds. This talk investigates whether *Streptomyces*'s bioactive compounds contribute to the healing properties attributed to these sites and whether their spiritual and cultural context can offer new perspectives on healing that could inspire innovative therapeutic approaches in modern medicine.

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KEYNOTE LECTURE THREE

The Heavens Declare: Cosmology and Divine Design

Rodney Dennis Holder

The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (Cambridge)
UNITED KINGDOM



Why are the laws of nature so special (“fine-tuned”) that the universe gives rise to intelligent creatures like ourselves, who can observe it and discover those laws? Is there really anything to explain, given that, if this were otherwise, we would not be here to pose the question? Can some better theory (a theory of everything?) do what is required by calculating the physical constants, so removing all free parameters from the equations? Alternatively, can the existence of a multiverse, a vast or infinite collection of universes, explain the specialness of this universe? Or, in the light of discoveries in modern cosmology, can we still speak of a divine mind behind the creation? In the words of the Psalmist, can we in the modern age still affirm that “The heavens declare the glory of God”? These are the questions we explore in this lecture.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION THREE | Science and Society

INVITED SPEAKER SEVEN

Paul Feyerabend on Science, Theology, and the Good of Society

Nancey Claire Murphy

Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena), USA



Philosopher Paul Feyerabend was well known in the 1970s for calling into question the value, and even the possibility, of science. What may not be widely known is that he had a keen interest in religion and theology (which usually meant Catholicism). Important for this conference is the fact that the motivation for his work was, specifically, the good of society. I claim that his critique of science (and technology) is even more relevant today.

ABSTRACTS

SECTION THREE | Science and Society

INVITED SPEAKER EIGHT

Artificial Intelligence and Christian Humanism

Paul Clemens Cavallin

NLA University College, NORWAY



The rapid development of artificial intelligence, especially autonomous agents, raises fundamental questions about what it means to be a person. This challenges any humanism that claims a unique position for humanity. Also, forms of Christian humanism need to reflect on what it means to be created and to create in this new context. Is the notion of an electronic or artificial person reasonable in light of the development of artificial intelligence, or is it a serious mistake?

ABSTRACTS

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INVITED SPEAKER NINE

Contributions of the Benedictine Order to the Development of Experimental Natural Science

Boris Kožnjak

Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, CROATIA



The beginnings of natural science are often portrayed as a sudden emergence during the "scientific revolution" of the 16th and 17th centuries. However, historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science point to the continuous development of the natural sciences from the Renaissance back to the late Middle Ages. Despite this, early medieval science remains insufficiently studied. This lecture situates the roots of the "scientific revolution" precisely in the early Middle Ages, a period often mistakenly perceived as one of stagnation and decline, with particular emphasis on the role of Saint Benedict and the Benedictine order. Their groundbreaking understanding of physical labor fundamentally differed from the ancient Greco-Roman approach, which – though rich in theoretical and mathematical knowledge as well as technological innovations – did not give rise to experimental natural science. This was due to certain philosophical, theological, and social obstacles that were effectively removed by the Benedictine historical shift.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Religion and Science Facing Artificial Intelligence Challenges

Kotel Dadon

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, CROATIA



The Artificial Intelligence revolution represents a significant transformation, raising ethical and practical questions. It replicates human cognitive abilities, offering opportunities alongside risks. It is essential to ensure transparency, ethical guidelines, and human supervision to align artificial intelligence with moral values. We will discuss the differences between the secular Western approach and the religious perspective, focusing on the Jewish-mystical approach regarding the status of artificial and human intelligence. We will also examine the possibilities available to religious leaders to harness artificial intelligence for religious purposes as a synergistic and complementary tool. This includes utilizing its benefits to improve human life in general, increasing efficiency in many areas such as education, health, and religious services, while preserving identity and human values. Ensuring the use of artificial intelligence is guided by moral and ethical considerations, emphasizing the uniqueness and complexity of human essence. On the other hand, we will also address its limitations and the potential dangers to human creativity and ethics resulting from uncontrolled use.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

How Humans Are Different Than Animals

Denis Sunko

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science, CROATIA



It is argued that the ability to reframe the context is the critical operational difference between humans and animals. The classic experiment of a chimpanzee solving a problem to get a banana is reevaluated to point out that the chimpanzee accepts the artificial context uncritically, while a human would not. An example of natural and social evolution achieving the same end by different means shows that the human approach is purposeful, as distinct from merely useful. The distinction is illustrated by a simple example of spontaneous symmetry breaking. It motivates a thermodynamic definition of both human and animal politics: Social moderation of spontaneous symmetry breaking.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Mathematics and Aliens

Giandomenico Boffi

Nuovo SEFIR APS, ITALY



When asked what topic is best for communicating with aliens, many answers that it is mathematics, because the universe is assumed to be written in mathematical language. My intention is to show that this is not at all a given for various reasons, not least the profound intertwining of mathematics and all dimensions of the human.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

On Finality and Truthfulness in Open System Behavior

Franjo Jović

*Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Electrical
Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology Osijek,
CROATIA*



Finality is the ability of an organismic system to achieve its goal. Finality is the most important level of information. With machines, finality is, in principle, narrowly programmed, controlled, and limited. The task is set for correctly engineering the information at the interface of machines and organismic systems. Based on the works of Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer, and Heidegger, it is proposed to unambiguously engineer information in an open system, such as in a goal-oriented sports game. The comparison of two matches is given from the standpoint of the truthfulness of their representation.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Religious Experience at the Crossroads of Neuroscience, Theology, and Philosophy

Saša Horvat

*University of Rijeka, Faculty of Medicine & Faculty of Health Studies,
CROATIA*



Understanding religious experience requires navigating between deeply personal, often ineffable events and the objective frameworks of scientific inquiry. This lecture explores how neuroscience approaches religious experiences, what counts as “religious” from interdisciplinary perspectives, and how these experiences are operationalized in empirical studies. Special attention will be given to the tensions between subjective experiences and measurable brain activity, along with philosophical and theological reflections that help contextualize scientific findings. By critically examining current research, the lecture offers new directions for bridging subjective depth and scientific rigor in the study of religion and the brain.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Human Behavior and The Mind: A Perspective of Philosophy, Christianity and Cognitive Neuroscience, Can There Be Any Overlap?

Mirko Čorlukić^a & Dora Novak^b

^a *Special Hospital for Children with Neurodevelopmental and Motor Disorder*

^b *University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
CROATIA*



Human behavior and the mind have challenged philosophers, religious thinkers, and scientists for centuries. From metaphysical questions about the soul and reason to empirical research on the brain and neural networks, the understanding of man has gradually changed – from spiritual and rational concepts to biological and cognitive models. In this paper, we present a brief outline of the development of these ideas through key stages: philosophy, religion, and psychology, with an emphasis on introducing contemporary cognitive neuroscience.

In this way, we want to show how certain disciplines have sought to establish themselves in human intellectual history by developing their own epistemological foundations – by defining their subject matter, methods, and criteria of truth – and thus create their own recognizable identities.

But also, how in today's socio-culture there is room for teachings that some consider to be outdated (philosophy, religion) and for contemporary teachings based on empirical science. The only question is where and how we use or live these teachings in space-time.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Science, Social Order and Religious Values. The Revival of Merton's Thesis

Constantin Stoenescu

University of Bucharest, ROMANIA



In the late 1930s, Robert K. Merton published two studies, one on the Puritan impulse on the development of modern science, the other on the relationship between science and social order. Later, the two studies will be interpreted together as an analysis of the relationship between science, social order, and values, but the interpretations will have different emphases. My goal in this study is to achieve a systematization of these interpretations and to argue that these interpretative dominants have contextual roots related always to the accepted ethos.

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Created in God's Image, Connected Online: Theological Perspectives on Youth Identity and Relationality in the Age of Social Media

Katarína Valčová

*Comenius University in Bratislava, Lutheran Theological Faculty,
SLOVAKIA*



The lecture examines how the traditional theological notion of Imago Dei informs teenage identity development and relational dynamics in the era of social media. It examines, from the perspective of religious anthropology, how digital platforms both mirror and influence the self-perception and relationships of young individuals. Although social media provides novel avenues for connection and self-expression, it may also distort actual identity and prevent genuine relationships. The lecture integrates principles from theology and psychology to investigate how digital interactions might either facilitate or hinder the formation of a self that authentically embodies the divine image, particularly in the context of community and communication. Particular emphasis is placed on the function of faith groups in directing adolescents towards social media participation, respecting their intrinsic dignity, and cultivating significant relationships. The study ultimately promotes a balanced and contemplative digital presence that fosters both personal identification and relational goals as manifestations of God's image.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

From Enframing to Encoding. Phenomenological Reflections on the Nature of Digital Technology

Branko Klun

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, SLOVENIA



When Heidegger discussed the nature of modern science, he could not have imagined the rise of digital technology, which is radically transforming human life today. In this paper, I want to show how digital technology is the final step in the development of modern science, which, according to Husserl, is based on the “mathematical project of nature”, and whose essence, according to Heidegger, consists in “(en)framing” the whole of reality to control it. The transition from analogue to digital technology, however, represents a new stage in the mathematization of reality. The “enframing” becomes the “encoding” of every phenomenon into a sequence of just two digits, and with the rise of AI, this encoding now seizes human thinking itself, exposing humans to the danger of forgetting their own “essence” in the omnipresent digitalized world.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Science or Wisdom?

Dan Đaković

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In this lecture, we'll try to answer these few questions: How to understand science? What is wisdom? What is their relationship? Can we have the first without the second or the second without the first? Is there a primacy or hierarchy between them? Which is more important and why? What is divine or infused wisdom? What is the difference between the wisdom of Athens, Ganges, or Tibet and the wisdom of Jordan?

ABSTRACTS

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

From Scholasticism to Darwinism

Bruno Petrušić

CePOZiR, CROATIA



Applying Kuhn's "paradigm shift" offers a simplified yet insightful narrative of science's evolution from Galileo to Darwin. The scholastic paradigm, emphasizing teleology and authority, faced anomalies leading to the Galilean Revolution, which championed a mechanistic, mathematical approach. Newton's synthesis solidified this new paradigm. However, questions in natural history paved the way for Darwin's revolutionary theory of evolution by natural selection, a new paradigm that rejected fixed species and introduced a naturalistic mechanism for life's diversity. While not a perfect fit due to the complexity and continuity of scientific progress, this Kuhnian lens highlights the profound intellectual shifts and changing methodologies that led to our current Darwinian understanding. This framework, despite its limitations, provides a valuable heuristic for grasping these transformative periods in scientific history.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

From *Scientia* to *Sapientia*: Paradigm, Narrative, and Meaning in Contemporary Knowledge Making

Michal Valčo

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SLOVAKIA



The paper revisits the long-standing debate over science and scientism, arguing that an exclusive identification of knowledge with the methods of the natural sciences is philosophically self-defeating and culturally impoverishing. I first map the key epistemic claims of contemporary scientism and show why they fail their own empiricist strictures. I then frame scientism as a modern metanarrative (Thomas Kuhn) that shapes, but also constrains, both public policy and personal identity. New case studies – from debates over artificial intelligence to cosmology – illustrate how epistemological reductionism can erode public trust, fuel culture war polarization, and marginalize ethical and aesthetic forms of insight. In the constructive section, I propose an integrative model that moves from *scientia* to *sapientia*: it retains the rigor of empirical method while acknowledging the indispensable roles of narrative, metaphysics, and theology in rendering scientific discoveries meaningful.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Kitcher and the Scientific Research Agenda

Arnon Levy

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, ISRAEL



Despite the current surge of interest within philosophy of science in science and values, some questions concerning the science-society interface have remained largely neglected. An important instance of this is the determination of scientific research agendas: what should (and shouldn't) get studied? My goal in this paper is to rehabilitate, as it were, questions about the scientific research agenda, bringing them into sharper focus and indicating how, in a broad sense, they ought to be tackled. In particular, I will argue, first, that if we are concerned with the impact of science on society, then the scientific research agenda should be top of our minds. And, second, that to develop a proper approach to the setting of scientific research agendas, we must appeal to a substantive, rich conception of political justice, rather than thin, largely formal principles of democratic governance, as the only extant account, due to Philip Kitcher, does. I explore these issues, in part, in the concrete context of the biomedical research agenda and the dominance of private actors in its determination. I conclude by drawing lessons about the idea of a political philosophy of science, how it ought to be constructed, and what is needed to articulate sound ideas about issues of justice and social concern involving science and its progress.

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CONTRIBUTED PRESENTATIONS

Demarcation Problem in the Age of “Triage Epistemology”

Darko Polšek

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Scientists increasingly feel that it is difficult to explain and justify scientific claims, and lay public at the same time trusts scientific institutions and scientists less and less. This has been quite pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but public distrust continues to soar. One of the reasons for the growing distrust is the requirement to get scientific results immediately. The paper considers various heuristics to test scientific credibility “during the times of triage epistemology”, and to orient oneself in the glut of claims, publications, and arguments.

ABSTRACTS

HONORARY LECTURE UNDER THE AUSPICE OF THE HEAD OF THE CENTER

The Beginning of the Universe and the Question of Causes: Theological Reflection on the Alternatives to *Creatio ex nihilo*

Krešimir Cerovac

Zagreb, CROATIA



This paper explores the relationship between modern cosmology and classical Christian theology about creation, especially regarding the cause of the universe's existence. It looks at current cosmological models that try to explain how the universe began without referring to a transcendent cause, comparing them to the traditional teaching of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). While these scientific models are interesting, they often lack the deep meaning or solid evidence needed to fully replace the theological view. The main question is: Is it more reasonable to believe the universe came into being spontaneously from nothing, with no cause, or that the universe was created out of nothing by the action of a transcendent cause? The paper points out that rejecting the need for a transcendent cause leads to conceptual problems and uncertainty in understanding. On the other hand, classical philosophy and Christian theology offer a consistent framework for understanding the universe – not just as having a beginning in time, but also as continually dependent on God as the First Cause and the foundation of all existence. The paper partly builds on the ideas of Jesuit theologian Rudolf Brajčić, who has written on this topic.

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