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Science versus Religion as Guide to Metaphysics

This is the second volume of the double issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* devoted to the relationship between science and religion.

The contributions across these two volumes have mostly been concerned with, and argued for, various aspects of a non-reductive view of this relationship, according to which reality is not limited to what the natural sciences can tell us about it. That is the view that science and religion are not in conflict, or that the advances made by the natural sciences do not undermine religion as an adequate means of addressing the big questions humanity faces.

This is not only a very welcome but also exciting result confirming that after many decades of an almost complete monopoly of scientific naturalism in English language philosophy the field is beginning to open up to a more diverse range of views. This development has made it possible for philosophers in the analytic tradition to engage with topics of deep human importance in a serious and systematic way.

Amongst these topics the human relationship with transcendence in particular has prompted new and already influential responses. Important examples of such responses include the Stanton and Gifford lectures delivered by Roger Scruton in 2010 and 2011 respectively and subsequently published as *The Face of God* and *The Soul of The World*, or Charles Taliferro's *The Golden Cord: A Short Book on the Secular and the Sacred*.¹

There has also been a revival of reflections directly concerning the relationship between science and religion, but arguing against the conflict narrative and advancing a more nuanced understanding of the place

1) See Roger Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures 2010* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012); Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014); Charles Taliferro, *The Golden Cord: A Short Book on the Secular and the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

both these phenomena have in our culture. These reflections have been offered by believers and atheists alike with, on the one hand, John Cottingham's *The Spiritual Dimension* representing the believer's perspective and, on the other, Tim Crane's *The Meaning of Belief* representing the atheist's perspective.²

The opening up of the field to these extremely important contributions has arguably been made possible however by seminal developments in metaphysics. These developments rely principally on powerful arguments showing that phenomenal consciousness cannot be described by appeal to the structure or functioning of a purely physical system. The arguments in question originate with the work of Thomas Nagel, Howard Robinson and David Chalmers among others. In the last ten years or so these arguments have brought about a turn towards metaphysics in English language philosophy.

In 2012 Benedikt Paul Goecke publishes *After Physicalism*, a collection of papers arguing that subjectivity cannot be reduced to objectivity or in other words that the mental cannot be reduced to the physical.³ There are several positions that provide promising alternatives to physicalism including classical dualism, property dualism, idealism, or panpsychism. Property dualism has been developed by David Chalmers in response to the problem of qualia.⁴ Howard Robinson advances a modern form of Berkeleian idealism.⁵ Panpsychism has been chiefly argued for by Philip Goff, who has recently published *Why? The Purpose of the Universe*, in which he proposes a view of the fundamental nature of reality which is neither theistic or atheistic while denying reductive physicalism.⁶ Finally Ralph Weir in his *The Mind-Body Problem and Metaphysics: An Argument from Consciousness to Mental Substance* argues persuasively that property dualism cannot be consequent unless it collapses into substance dualism and proposes the latter view as the most robust metaphysical position.⁷

The papers comprising the thematic section of this second issue devoted to science and religion are a part of this increasingly important current in analytic metaphysics. The first paper is Stephen Priest's reply to Joshua Farris. Joshua Farris's piece in the first issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* on science and religion looked at Priest's conception of the "conditioned" and the "unconditioned" modes of thought. In his reply Priest agrees with Farris that reductive materialism lacks the explanatory power to account for numerous phenomena such as consciousness, subjective experience, moral value, free will and so on. Priest also agrees with Farris that denying the existence of these phenomena has not merely epistemological consequences but impacts our moral sensitivity. He develops this idea by arguing that just as we may take an unconditioned perspective on the world that gives us metaphysical insight so too we can have an unconditioned perspective on ourselves as persons that gives us moral insight. Both perspectives, according to Priest, entail the existence of God.

The second paper of the thematic section by Bartosz Wesół "Quantum Meta-physics: Nonlocality and Limits of Determinism" explores how Quantum Mechanics might provide the ground for libertarian free will. He appeals to a Wittgensteinian framework on the one hand and a Kantian framework to show that first, epistemological determinism is false, and, second, that metaphysical determinism is a doctrine assumed a priori

2) See John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension, Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Tim Crane, *The Meaning of Belief* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

3) See Benedikt Paul Goecke (ed.), *After Physicalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

4) See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind, In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

5) Howard Robinson, *From The Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance, Resurrecting the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Howard Robinson, *Matter and Sense, A Critique of Contemporary Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

6) See Philip Goff, *Why? The Purpose of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

7) See Ralph Weir, *The Mind-Body Problem and Metaphysics: An Argument from Consciousness to Mental Substance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).

and not something discovered through scientific inquiry. Therefore, Wesół concludes, determinism is not a consequence of empirical enquiry but rather a metaphysical presupposition which contradicts some of our most basic intuitions. Like Priest, Wesół, notices that denying free will has far reaching ethical consequences, which are another argument against accepting this doctrine. Fundamentally however, Wesół argues, determinism is a metaphysical doctrine which is not supported by contemporary science, but rather assumed as a principle. Although, as Wesół claims, we cannot by appeal to science prove free will exists either, the denial of free will amounts to philosophical dogmatism.

The final paper in the thematic section “Nothingness at the Intersection of Science, Philosophy, and Religion” by Nicholas Waghorn analyses the inability of natural science to deal with the concept of ‘nothing’. This inability, Waghorn argues, has far reaching consequences for the debate between scientifically motivated atheism and theism. Waghorn offers a close analysis of the concept of ‘nothing’ which results in three claims, each of which undermines scientifically motivated atheism and supports theism – even if only in a minimal version. These claims are 1) that science is constitutionally unable to show theism to be a redundant hypothesis 2) that a popular atheist response to the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’ undermines the presupposition of atheism, and 3) that the presupposition of atheism is unsupported. In conclusion Waghorn rejects the thesis that science and religion are in conflict as science has no rival view to present on the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’.

The Forum section contains two papers: Ebrahim Safabakhsh’s “Pragmatic Or Absolute Establishment of Philosophy” and Mauro Javier Saiz’s “Taylor and Vattimo on the Place of Culture in Political Practical Reasoning”. Safabakhsh’s paper concerns the non-demonstrable assumptions of philosophy which often even elude clear articulation. Safabakhsh argues that since these assumptions cannot be fixed by rational reflection they produce conflicting intuitions about the foundations of rational thought. These intuitions are that, on the one hand, we have to be epistemic pragmatists as we have no direct access to the nature of reality, and so have to choose our epistemic framework with practical goals in mind. On the other hand however, pragmatism is vulnerable to the criticism that adopting pragmatism is itself merely pragmatic – and so it fails to provide a stable epistemic principle – or points at an absolute epistemic truth, in which case it defeats pragmatism.

In the second piece in the Forum section Mauro Javier Saiz discusses the application of philosophical hermeneutics to political theory. Saiz compares the conceptions of Charles Taylor and Gianni Vattimo arguing that they are both involved in just such a project. Saiz examines how both authors treat the category of ‘tradition’ which is a key concept in hermeneutics. The paper looks at the ontologies of tradition proposed by each author, and considers the place each of them assigns to tradition in sociopolitical decision-making. Saiz concludes that Taylor’s model of understanding and employing tradition in current political and moral debates is more promising as Vattimo’s nihilistic approach does not provide us with a norm for decision and action.

The penultimate paper in the issue is a discussion paper co-authored by Randall Auxier and Samuel Maruszewski “Post-Cultural Studies: A Brief Introduction”. The authors consider how recent world politics has damaged the framework we normally assumed on various levels of communication and suggest that this damage has been so severe that the very foundations of how we as human beings understand ourselves have been shaken ushering in a post-cultural age. In response, the authors appeal to Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms to sketch out a program for studying this present condition. The authors argue that the tools provided by Cassirer have the capacity to organize and make sense of the human being, and what it means to identify as one in a reality transformed by the collapse of communication.

The final contribution is an interview between the editor of this double issue and Professor Zofia Rosińska entitled “Prayer as a form of life, life as a form of prayer”. The interview concerns several themes from the book on the experience of prayer *Po śladach. Doświadczenie modlitewne w ujęciu filozofii kultury*, which Professor

Rosińska has recently published.⁸ These themes include the value of petitionary prayer, individual and communal aspects of prayer, the cultural dimension of prayer, sincerity of prayer, as well as questions like what does it mean for a prayer to be answered. The interview provides a supplement to the book focusing on some of the questions that remained in the background in the original publication. It will be useful both for those who have not read the book yet as well as for readers who want to explore some of these topics further.

This double volume is also one of the results of a five year project funded by the John Templeton Foundation and based at the Ian Ramsey Centre at the University of Oxford “New Horizons for Science and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe”. The aim of this project is to connect scholars working on various aspects of the relationship between science and religion both within the region as well as beyond it. There is a very impressive and large group of scholars developing this tradition in Central and Eastern Europe including contemporary scholars like Michał Heller in Poland and Tomasz Halik in Czechia – both Templeton Prize Laureates.

Nonetheless there is comparatively less dialogue on this and other issues within Central and Eastern Europe as such than for example in the English language philosophy. It is fortuitous that these two issues on science and religion have appeared simultaneously with the launch of a project at the University of Warsaw devoted to the idea of Central and Eastern European identity. This project, conceived and run by the Editor In Chief of *Eidos. A Journal for philosophy of Culture*, Przemysław Bursztyka has brought together thinkers from six countries to discuss the questions laid out by Bursztyka in his essay in the preceding volume “Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe: Toward a Common Ethos”.⁹ It is the hope of the editors of this journal that this will be the beginning of a longstanding collaboration between institutions and individuals on this and other themes.

8) Zofia Rosińska, *Po śladach. Doświadczenie modlitewne w ujęciu filozofii kultury* [After the Traces. The Experience of Prayer in the Perspective of Philosophy of Culture], (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2023).

9) Przemysław Bursztyka, “Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe: Toward a Common Ethos.” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 7, no. 3 (2023): 67–102, <https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2023.0024>.



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