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ISCAST is a think tank of Christian academics, scientists, professionals and theologians who explore the interface and interactions between science & technology with the Christian faith.

COSAC 2011 Feedback

This year's COSAC (Conference On Science And Christianity) was held at the Aspect Tamar Valley Resort in Tasmania from 26-28 August. We asked participants 'What has been most valuable for you at this COSAC?' and some of the feedback we received (in no particular order) is as follows:

- Connecting with Christian thinkers across Australia and forming the start of friendships.
- Hearing speakers of very high quality. Fellowship with like-minded folk. Relaxed atmosphere.
- The format of the breakout sessions led to good discussion and coverage of topics.
- The lectures by Denis Alexander and Nancey Murphy and the parallel sessions that I was able to attend. The devotional sessions with Bp John Harrower were also good.
- The fellowship - meeting and talking with speakers and other ISCAST members, etc.
- The opportunity to investigate (and purchase) new science/faith books.
- Personal discussions with people over coffee and meals.
- Opportunities for questions and discussion very much appreciated.
- The time spent meeting with fellow delegates and talking through ideas.
- Connection with thinkers/writers on evolutionary/faith issues.



Lecturers Denis Alexander and Nancey Murphy

- The timing structure of the talks was excellent - significant time allocated to discussion (rather than lecture) improved the value immensely.
- Getting to know other Christians who are active in science and research.
- Listening to fascinating lectures, purchasing several books about subjects of interest and in some cases meeting the author.
- To sit at the feet of exceptional Christians.
- The range of expertise.
- General conversation with other people and the interesting talks.
- Bp John Harrower's devotions were memorable.
- Renewing friendships from previous COSACs and the meal-time discussions.



Bishop John Harrower



Listening and learning



Conversations over coffee

In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- Event News

News Items

Items of interest to the interaction between science and Christianity and of significance to the ISCAST family. Your submissions of these are welcome.



A Sense of Awe: science, faith and wonder

ABC Radio National's Encounter program is hosting a conversation called A Sense of Awe: science, faith and wonder, produced by Chris Mulherin. To find out more about the project go to www.asenseofawe.net, where there are also links to Facebook and Twitter. There is also an article by Chris on the ABC Religion and Ethics portal. [More](#)



The Nature of Nature

ISI has released an expansive compendium called 'The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science', which is now widely available at a very affordable price. At over 900 pages and 500,000 words, the book features over forty essays from an extremely diverse field of philosophers and thinkers including Alvin Plantinga, Robert Koons, Stephen Meyer, Michael Shermer, Alan Guth, Nancey Murphy, Roger Penrose, John Searle and Dallas Willard. [More](#)

News Items



Science v Faith: What's The Problem?

Melissa Mack writes for Australian online paper InDaily about the science and faith conference currently being held at Tabor College in Adelaide, jointly organised by The Faraday Institute and Tabor College. [More](#)



A Leap of Truth: Expanding the Paradigm

The BioLogos' website features a number of clips from the forthcoming documentary 'A Leap of Truth', featuring Faraday advisory board members Prof. Alister McGrath and Revd Dr John Polkinghorne. [More](#)



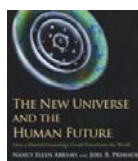
Book Review: The Great Partnership

Jonathan Sacks' book The Great Partnership was reviewed in the Church Newspaper on Friday August 19, 2011. [More](#)



More Educated, More Religious

CNN reports on a recent study in the US into the correlation between levels of education and levels of religious belief. It turns out that the secularist truism "more educated = less religious" is not accurate. [More](#)



The New Universe and the Human Future

A review of Nancy Ellen Abrams and Joel R. Primack's Yale University Press-published book on developing a "shared cosmology". The book has received positive reviews from Desmond Tutu, Martin Rees and Paul Davies. [More](#)



Emergence: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts

What is emergence? Ross McKenzie explains this key concept in science and religion using examples from different areas of science. The concept of emergence is examined from both philosophical and theological standpoints. [More](#)



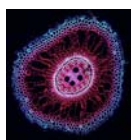
Neuroethics

The ethical challenges of memory-dampening drugs are likely to be manageable and the pay-offs considerable says Adam Kolber in Nature. [More](#)



Artificial Life

Denis Overbye reports for the New York Times on the latest attempts by scientists to create life artificially in the lab. By some accounts, they are getting very close indeed. [More](#)



Artificial life research triggers concerns

Anna Saleh from ABC News discusses a debate held at the University of Sydney regarding synthetic biology. [More](#)



Malaria vaccine to be released in Queensland's Griffith University

A malaria vaccine expected to protect against all known strains of the deadly disease will be launched at a Queensland university this week. [More](#)



Mars 500 crew breaks endurance record

Enclosed in a metal spacecraft, the Mars500 crew have endured 438 days of isolation, living on a spartan diet of cereal bars and pasta with precious little contact with friends and family back home. [More](#)



Majority of U.S. students believe science and religion are not in conflict: survey

Dr. Scot McKnight writes on the Jesus Creed blog about a recent study conducted by Christopher Scheitle from Penn State which was reported in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 50, p. 175 (2011) U.S. College Students' Perception of Religion and Science: Conflict, Collaboration, or Independence? [More](#)



Medically Supervised Injecting Centres - A Good Idea or Not?

The issue of medically supervised ("safe") injecting rooms polarises the community, and many Christians are strongly opposed to the idea. But drug and alcohol physician Alan Gijssbers examines the arguments on both sides of the debate for Engage.mail. [More](#)



Climate debate 'appalling' says Chief Scientist

Australia's Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb, has lamented the quality of public debate on climate change, saying it "borders on appalling". [More](#)



2011 New College Lectures - The Future of Theology

The 2011 New College Lectures will be held from the 27-29 September and will feature three 'younger' theologians who will explore the theme, 'The future of theology'. [More](#)



Borderlands Seminar

The first annual Borderlands Seminar was a great success, with Professor Tom McLeish, Durham University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research. Tom explored 'the Borderlands of Science and Faith'. [More](#)



Scientists trap antimatter

At the Cern particle collider in Geneva, physicists have created and trapped 309 antihydrogen atoms for a record amount of time, up to 1,000 seconds (just over 16 minutes). [More](#)



Life, science and... everything

Prominent Australian research biologist Sir Gustav Nossal discusses science, vaccinations, climate change, uncertainty and belief in a wide-ranging interview with Jo Chandler in The Age. [More](#)

No access to the internet and want more information? Contact the ISCAST office (see back page) and we will forward the full item to you. Postage and handling fees apply.

Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology: Journal Abstracts

The ISCAST Online Journal – Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology is a forum for those exploring the interaction between science, technology and the Christian faith. Submissions are invited and they may be academic articles, less formal discussions aimed at non-academic readers, opinion pieces, or book reviews. Articles and discussions will be refereed. The intended readers are Christians interested in science and technology, and scientists and technologists interested in the Christian faith. Specialist knowledge is not assumed. Below are selected abstracts from the journal. (see www.iscast.org/journalpage)



Towards a post-modern apologetic

Alan Gijsbers, August 2011

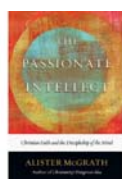
Author

Assoc Prof Alan Gijsbers, University of Melbourne, Head Addiction Medicine, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Medical Director, Substance Withdrawal Unit, The Melbourne Clinic, Richmond, National President ISCAST.

Abstract

I find the current approach to Christian apologetics quite unsatisfactory. 'Ten reasons why atheists are wrong and I'm right', smacks both of intellectual arrogance and misunderstands how humans come to conclusions.

A good example of the poverty of the believer's argument is the frequent statement, that atheism is an inadequate foundation for a coherent ethic. Granted that there may be some difficulty finding a 'rational basis' for ethics in atheism, we nevertheless find that there are many very ethical atheists in the debate, and to argue that they are not ethical is quite demeaning and simply wrong. Conversely of course atheists argue that to invoke a deity as a basis for ethics is unsatisfactory, a tit for tat if you like. Thus we have another slanging match from entrenched positions with each side wishing the other side was more open minded and therefore able to be persuaded to the other's point of view!



Review of Alister McGrath's book 'The passionate intellect: Christian faith and the discipleship of the mind'

InterVarsity Press, 2010, 210 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-8308-3843-

Reviewed by

James Garth, August 2011

Review Extract

Alister McGrath is a prolific author at the best of times, but during 2010/2011 he has surely outdone himself, publishing – at my count – no fewer than eight (yes, eight!) new books, spanning the genres of apologetics, science & faith, academic theology, and even children's fiction.

One of these books, The Passionate Intellect,

is a unique compilation of McGrath's previously unpublished lectures, papers and talks given at universities and colleges in recent years, substantively re-written and woven together into a cohesive whole. McGrath's core objective is to stimulate the reader to embrace the study of 'mere theology'¹, as a pursuit that can enrich one's faith and deepen our engagement with the world around us (p. 8). In this regard, the book is admirably successful.

As someone who has often found the field of theology frustratingly arcane and frequently under-determined by the data, I was personally challenged and encouraged by the unique vision of theology painted by McGrath in The Passionate Intellect.

Using the evocative image of 'theology mapping the landscape of faith', McGrath begins by suggesting that the proper purpose of theology is to help us articulate, deepen and communicate the Christian vision of God in all its fullness and wonder (p. 22). He suggests that theology is a pursuit that is decidedly corporate; the landscape of faith being so vast that no individual can fully comprehend its panorama. Theology helps the individual Christian by identifying aspects of the landscape that may have been overlooked or filtered out, whilst simultaneously offering helpful correctives to individual, subjective descriptions of the landscape.

¹ Indeed, this book was previously published in the UK by SPCK under the title Mere Theology.



Science and Faith

Alan Gijsbers, August 2011

Author

Assoc Prof Alan Gijsbers, University of Melbourne, Head Addiction Medicine, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Medical Director, Substance Withdrawal Unit, The Melbourne Clinic, Richmond, National President ISCAST.

Abstract

Science and faith are often contrasted. Naive scientists critical of Christianity claim they accept the facts of science rather than the mythology of Christianity. Faith and facts are often contrasted. However scientists exercise faith in a number of different areas and the relations between science and faith are more intertwined than opposed.

First a scientist believes facts. That in itself is an act of faith. Under certain conditions water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. Gravity always acts. Staphylococci cause boils. Sometimes the facts of a case have to be verified. Is it really true that water goes down the plughole clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anti-clockwise in the southern? Scientific facts, like historical facts can be verified according to set norms. The reliability of witnesses to the facts comes into the picture.



Putting Faith to the Test

James Garth, July 2011

Author

James is a practising aerospace engineer and a Fellow of ISCAST.

Abstract

During a lunchroom discussion at work one of my colleagues once remarked, 'Frankly, I find it astonishing in our modern society that a single, intelligent, educated person still exists who believes in the supernatural, in an interventionist God'.

For those of us who have a career in science or technology, such questions seem to perpetually lurk below the surface, especially so in the West where our societies benefit most visibly from the fruits of scientific and technological progress, yet remain 'uncomfortably haunted by the memory of religion' (Williams 2009).

Our innate intuitions that the natural world may point to a transcendent reality beyond itself continue to be challenged by serious thinkers such as Michel Onfray, dubbed 'France's most popular philosopher' (Melville 2007) who openly argues that 'monotheisms loathe science' (Onfray 2007). The views of New Atheists like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett have received extensive air-time in recent years, acting as the sharp end of a much larger spear of robustly materialist philosophy and secular culture. Aided by less aggressive atheists such as E.O. Wilson and Steven Weinberg, the picture being painted is one of perpetual conflict, where the forces of science and reason are locked in battle with religions, the 'armies of the night' (Asimov 1981), over which they will eventually and inevitably triumph.

Do you have an article to submit to Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology?
Contact the editorial team via www.iscast.org/journalpage

Event News



A trip to the Grampians (Vic)

Date: 22-23 October 2011

Details: Meet at 11am at the parking lot near Heatherlie Quarry near Hall's Gap with a packed lunch for a picnic at the quarry. From there we'll head to Pomonal Church for the afternoon/evening events. On Saturday night we'll head out for dinner somewhere nearby. Sunday service starts at a reasonable 10am and you will offer an optional walk around Lake Fyans on Sunday after lunch.



Creation Science, Intelligent Design and Theistic Evolution (Bathurst)

A one-day seminar is to be held in Bathurst to provide a frank assessment of the various creation stories and beliefs that are held by a range of Christians from various traditions. We are seeking to provide a safe space to allow Christians to assess these often conflicting and controversial beliefs and how they square with Scripture.

Date: 5 November 2011

Location: All Saints Cathedral Hall, Bathurst

Time: 10.30am to 6.00pm

A full program is available on the website.

ISCAST Vic Annual General Meeting

ISCAST Vic will be holding their AGM in November and have invited Prof. David Clarke to speak.

More details available soon.

For more details on events visit www.iscast.org

Other News

ISCAST Shop

The online shop has been revamped and now includes a list of books with links to online book stores. When purchasing your next product through Amazon or the Book Depository, follow the links provided in the ISCAST Shop and earn ISCAST a percentage of sales!

Congratulations

Congratulations to John and Susan Pilbrow who celebrated 50 years of marriage on the 5th August.



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Contact the ISCAST office for payment details.



This is an official organ of ISCAST (The Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology, a not for profit organisation registered in New South Wales, Australia).

It is published quarterly in both hard copy and digital formats. It includes news items of relevance to both the ISCAST family and to the engagement of science and Christianity in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

It also includes abstracts of articles submitted to "Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology", ISCAST's online journal and the latest information of events hosted by ISCAST Chapters around Australia and New Zealand.

Items published on the ISCAST website and in this Digest explore the interaction between science and the Christian faith and will be published to foster the discussions and debate. ISCAST cannot endorse any or all of the opinions expressed here.

Details of events published will be correct as at the date of publication but you are encouraged to check the website or with the relevant contact before the event.

Hard copy versions of the Digest are available at the cost of \$10 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.

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