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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.

Christmas Greetings from all of us at ISCAST... and God's richest blessings for you all in 2013.



(We hope to see you all at COSAC in July 2013!)

2012 ISCAST Melb. Intensive

Murray Hogg

On the weekend of the 10th and 11th of November some 40 ISCASTians met to share intellectual and spiritual stimulation, and a solid dose of camaraderie, at the second ISCAST Melbourne "Intensive." The conference was entitled "Divine Disclosure in an Age of Science and Technology" pointing us towards the question "How can God be known in the modern age?"

As in 2010 the weekend conference was preceded by the ISCAST Melbourne Annual Lecture and both the annual lecture and conference shared the same keynote speaker. This year it was Rev. Dr. Mark Worthing, Senior Research Fellow of the Graeme Clarke Research Institute, Tabor Adelaide.

We met at the Centre for Theology and Ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia and the venue and its staff deserve the highest praise. Clean, spacious, and modern, with a convenient central location, the facility proved to have everything we could have hoped for at a very reasonable price. If that sounds like a plug, it certainly is!

The annual lecture was entitled "Computers, God, and Humanity: Toward a Theology of the Computer." In this lecture Mark offered us an overview of his theological reflections upon what computers actually are and what they represent.

The conference proper followed a familiar ISCAST format. Our keynote lecturer presented a Saturday and Sunday lecture on the keynote theme whilst a range of presenters offered their own insights during a number of parallel sessions. Mark kept us on our toes by first swapping the Sunday and Saturday lectures, and then doing away with a Sunday lecture altogether. So on Saturday we were treated to Mark's reflections on natural theology and how, if at all, God's self-disclosure occurs through the natural order. A brief mention of Karl Barth sparked spirited discussion more to the liking of the theologians in our midst, but testimony, at

least, to the diversity of interests for which ISCAST caters as well as of our success in fostering open and respectful discourse. We are pleased to report no heretics were burned as a consequence of the weekend's theological disputations!

Inspired by the several high quality presentations over the weekend, Mark dropped the scheduled Sunday lecture and sought instead to bring together the various insights on our conference theme. This was followed by a "conversation" during which participants were given opportunity to engage in an open discussion on matters raised during the weekend. Together, Mark's summation and the conversation provided a great opportunity for us to identify areas of agreement and disagreement regarding how God can be known in the modern age.

We at ISCAST are conscious that Christian faith involves more than just feeding the mind. To that end the weekend saw ample opportunity for connecting with friends old and new. There were, of course, the usual short and long breaks which occur at all conferences but, in addition, Saturday evening was set aside so participants could take advantage of nearby Lygon Street's many quality cafes and restaurants. When we reconvened on Sunday morning, there was opportunity to nourishing the heart during a time of reflection, prayer, and worship.

Overall, the weekend was a success on all counts. Not only was a great time had by all, but financially we broke even on the event and a couple of attendees were even inspired to take out ISAST membership!

For those unable to make the event we hope to make papers available through the online journal.

Thanks to Mark Worthing, the presenters, organisers, and participants. We look forward to doing it all again in 2014!

In this Issue:

- News Items
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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.



Test of FAITH homeschool resource

Isn't it tough for homeschooling parents to discern how to address the relationship between science and faith? Homeschool families need resources that portray the range of Christian views in a gracious way. And Christian young people need a resource that will equip them to think clearly, broadly, and biblically about current hot topics in science and religion. [Read more](#)



Is Information the Basis of Reality?

No, but it may be an important component. Imagine trying to spend a week without any information. No books or broadcasts, no entertainment or news. No communication with another person, whether written or spoken or visual or just touching.

It would be a diminished kind of existence. That is why extended solitary confinement is such a terrible punishment. Information plays a vital role in everyday human life. But to what extent is information the basis of reality? [Read more](#)



Taking over from evolution: how technology could enhance humanity

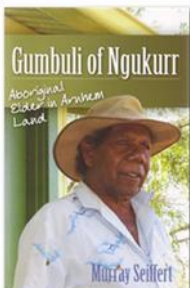
"The 21st century and beyond promises an array of novel methods for enhancing human cognition. Perhaps such improvements will enable future humans to find long-lasting solutions to global problems, as well as to go to the stars. Such promises, however, can be fulfilled only if we all value learning and intellectual development over short-term commercial gains." [Read more](#)



From Cooling System to Thinking Machine

Carl Zimmer writes on Hilary Putnam and "the Long, Strange History of Ideas About the Brain" in an article for the new website 'Being Human'.

...one of Putnam's thought experiments is familiar to millions of people: what it would be like to be a brain in a vat? [Read more](#)



Biography of indigenous Anglican priest wins top literature award

By Mark Brolly
Source: *The Melbourne Anglican*

Anglican priest, Gumbuli of Ngukurr, has been chosen as Australian Christian Book of the Year from more than 40 entrants – and given Melbourne publishing house Acorn Press, co-founded by the late Bishop John Wilson, its second consecutive win in the awards. [Read more](#)



Owen Gingerich's scientific revolution

To inspire better relations between faith and science, Gingerich has begun research for a new book on some exciting advances in the theory of evolution, interspersed with

ruminations on the supposed conflict between science and religion. For Gingerich, science explains everything within its' framework, but God can be seen in the details. Every random chance that led to the evolution of intelligent life could be seen as stemming from a guiding force. But Gingerich believes it is a force that uses science, and does not need to circumvent or overrule it. Science and logic were built into the design. [Read more](#)



Warming to nuclear option?

Leslie Kemeny makes the case that nuclear power, long considered a politically incorrect power source in Australia, is the best way to a clean energy future and to mitigate climate change. [Read more](#)



The deepest into space we've ever seen

Ten years' worth of images from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has created a photograph of the farthest we've ever seen into the universe.

It's a photo so spectacular that it needs a designation all to its own. Named the XDF, or eXtreme Deep Field, it represents 10 years' worth of photographs taken of a small patch of space at the centre of the Hubble Ultra Deep Field, which is located in the Fornax constellation. [Read more](#)



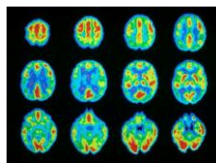
Seeking life on other worlds - and what it means for this one

NASA has pulled off an amazing technical achievement with its latest Mars landing. What are we hoping to find on Mars and what does it mean for us? Dr Roger Morris, Fellow of ISCAST, explores this groundbreaking mission. [Read more](#)



Bionic eye goes live in world first by Australian researchers

A blind woman can now see spots of light after being implanted with an early prototype bionic eye, confirming the potential of the world-first technology. [Read more](#)



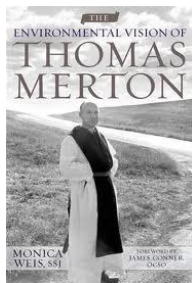
What neuroscience really teaches us and what it doesn't

In the early nineteen-nineties, David Poeppel, then a graduate student at M.I.T. (and a classmate of mine)—discovered an astonishing thing. He was studying the neurophysiological basis of speech perception, and a new technique had just come into vogue, called positron emission tomography (PET). About half a dozen PET studies of speech perception had been published, all in top journals, and David tried to synthesize them, essentially by comparing which parts of the brain were said to be active during the processing of speech in each of the studies. What he found, shockingly, was that there was virtually no agreement. Every new study had published with great fanfare, but collectively they were so inconsistent they seemed to add up to nothing. It was like six different witnesses describing a crime in six different ways. [Read 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)



Review of Monica Weis SSI's book 'The environmental vision of Thomas Merton'

University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011, xvi + 197 pp.

ISBN-10: 0813130042

ISBN-13: 978-0813130040

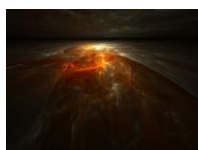
Reviewed by

Gregory Jacobs, December 2012

Review extract

Thomas Merton is perhaps the best known (Trappist) monk of the 20th century. While much has been written over the years on his deep spirituality and, through his writings, his inspiration to a new generation of contemplatives, little has been made of his integration and care for the environment within his thought and life both within and outside the walls of the Abbey of Gethsemani. This book goes a long way to correcting that imbalance.

Weis begins the story near the end of Merton's life with a letter sent to Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, where Merton recognizes in this ground-breaking book a kindred spirit. Merton does not read this book as a turning point in his life, but as a confirmation of all he has already thought and experienced of the need to extend justice issues into the care for the environment around us.



Creatio ex ethica or the ethical cause of our universe: a brief account

Author

Marty J Rice, School of Humanities, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland, Australia

Abstract

Theology/science methods, with ethical philosophy and perfect being theism, provide for a tripartite monist Ethical Encounter Theology (EET) worldview. It is argued that a divine love encounter with a prolepsis of moral evil evoked our physically-complexifying universe, so as to save the world by reifying right and wrong ethics for judgment. World history is not disposable when right- and

wrong-ethical ecollations must be accumulated for eschatological justice.

This cosmic origin from ethics theory subtends a robust theodicy, where moral and natural evils are normal, as in evolutionary theory.

A monogenetic dual sequential anthropogenesis is argued to harmonize scientific, biblical and ethical accounts of human origins. The model is consonant with high Christology yet accessible for different theist, deist, and possibly atheist ethical thinking. It provides a much needed ethical link between biblical perfect being theology and theology/science studies. In the wider, ethics-reality-religion debate, EET could facilitate inter-disciplinary conversations and inter-faith reconciliation.



Climate change: problem or opportunity? Understanding climate change in

the context of the Gospel

Authors

Brian Edgar and Mick Pope, June 2009

Abstract

Climate change is a social, ethical and theological issue as well as a scientific one. It needs to be understood in the context of God's purposes for the world. Scientifically, it is important that the world take steps to reduce human induced greenhouse gases, globally, 30 to 60% reductions on 2000 levels by 2050 to stabilise at under 30.

An ecologically sound spirituality of creation will address the issue of human consumption and the use of resources. It will also deal with the nature of our spiritual relationship to Christ and creation. Climate change has the potential to help us enhance our understanding of 'stewardship as self-control' and to enhance our ethical thinking by moving beyond tribal understandings of moral responsibility.

This has implications for, amongst other things, our understanding of nationalism, politics and the relationship of developed and developing countries. Climate change inevitably locates us within the broad context of the history of the world and civilization and challenges us to take on a moral responsibility for future generations. It raises questions of the purpose and meaning of life, into which a Christian eschatology has the opportunity to speak.



Divine action and the problem of miracles

Author

Rev. Dr Mark Worthing, BA in religion (Michigan), MDiv (SBTHS), STM (TLS), PhD (Regensburg), Dr Theol (Munich)

Abstract

Miracles may be meaningless within science, but that does not make them meaningless. A miracle is a manifestation of divine power, though it need not always transcend physical laws. However, physical laws may not be so immutable in a statistical quantum universe. Often a miracle is of a very personal kind. Does God intervene? He surely can, but how often does He?

Does science leave room for the miraculous?

When people learn that I have an interest in both theology and the physical sciences one of the most common questions asked – once the obligatory creation-evolution question has been cleared out of the way – is: 'Does science leave room for miracles?'. There are really only two ways I can honestly answer that question: 'No', and 'It depends upon how one understands science and, more importantly, miracle'.

Science, by virtue of its fundamental assumptions, has no formal place for the category of miracle. For the Christian, this may initially sound problematic. But it need not be. By traditional definition (and we will come back to this) a miracle is something that cannot be explained by any known or suspected physical laws or processes. In the face of a genuine miracle the most science can do is say that we do not understand how a certain event or phenomenon is possible.

Science is not even in a position to verify a possible miracle because we can never exclude the possibility that a physiological explanation might someday be available. For this reason, the category of miracle is not scientifically meaningful. This does not, however, mean that the category of miracle is meaningless. The assumption is made by many that what is not scientifically meaningful, has no meaning at all. This line of thinking goes back to an unfortunate but common informal assumption of science that only what science can legitimately examine is real and meaningful.

(Read the full article online)

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



ISCAST in association with GCRI presents:
Conference on Science and Christianity 2013 [COSAC 2013]

Call for presenters now open!

FAITH, HOPE AND QUARKS

SCIENTIFIC AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

EXPLORING:

- CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
- THE FUTURE (NEAR & DISTANT) AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN THOUGHT & LIFE

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- 'THEOLOGY & EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL LIFE', EXPLORING:
 - EXOBIOLOGY
 - PLANETARY GEOLOGY
 - SETI PROGRAMS
 - MARS EXPLORATION
 - EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL LIFE
 - CHRIST IN A UNIVERSE FILLED WITH INTELLIGENCE

19-21 July 2013
Tabor Adelaide, South Australia

Keynote presenters:

Rev Dr David Wilkinson
Astrophysicist and Principal of St John's College, Durham University

Rev Dr Denis Edwards
Senior Lecturer, Department of Theology, Flinders University

For more information, contact:
admin@iscast.org

www.iscast.org/cosac2013



Graeme Clark
Research Institute



Call for COSAC presenters now open!

Scientists, theologians, philosophers, professionals, historians and others are invited to apply to present papers that:

- Examine some aspect of Christian eschatology in the light of science and/or technology or
- Examine the future (near or distant) in the light of one or more branches of the sciences or technology and the implications for Christian thought or life

Papers will be allocated 20 minutes for presentation followed by a 20 minute discussion time. This time will be strictly adhered to and presenters are encouraged to script their presentations so that they will be able to fit them into the time allocated. ISCAST may wish to use or publish presentation slides on the internet so we ask that any copyright issues that might hamper this be addressed beforehand.

Apply to present online: tinyurl.com/9q3nzcz
Call for presenters closes 15 February 2013

Look us up on:

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Keep an eye on the website for events in 2013 www.iscast.org

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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 \$15 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.



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