

Biennial Conference in Philosophy, Religion and Culture
‘God, Freedom and Nature’
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Abstracts of Conference Papers

Alphabetical Order

Joseph Kenneth Michael Angert-Quilter

angertquilter@gmail.com

Australian Catholic University.

Thinking about transcultural reality.

My paper covers the interface between religious thought and the secular consequences formed from it, the psychological relationship with religion, and particular cultural frameworks where such relationships are practiced. Cross cultural theological thought presents a number of fascinating insights in the psychology of religious thought, opening up interfaces between God, freedom and nature by analysis of particular cultures, as well as hybridists of culture. The Christian concept of Gods creation and the Godhead bring with them a secular psychological folk perspective engrained in concepts such as the ego and the self. These concepts, rather than their religious counterparts, find a comfortable translation to Buddhist concepts of religion. Buddha nature and the cessation of the ego, fill many western religious gaps for secular minded folk. I will explain by analyzing three major cultures and religious traditions, the first Western Christianity, the second Maoridom (in New Zealand), and third Chinese Chan Buddhism, to draw out these transcendental, distinct and acquiescent practices. By doing so what I will show is that it is humanist thinking providing consistency with understanding freedom. That such an understanding involves religious thought of God therefore making for concepts of nature, both human and environmental. I will conclude by covering some thoughts on hybrid cultures and how concepts of God, Freedom and Nature are thanks to multifarious expectations of emergent cultural interchangeability.

Kathleen Butler-McIlwraith

Kathleen.Butler@newcastle.edu.au

University of Newcastle

Custodians of Country: Indigenous Christianity, Cultural Freedom and Nature in Australia

Many discourses in mainstream Australia contend that the adoption of Christianity by Indigenous Australians negates the continuity of Indigenous spiritual beliefs. This paper argues this fails to comprehend the processes of synthesis between Indigenous and Christian traditions. Fundamental to many Indigenous Christian practices is the continuity of a deep and abiding connection to Country, emphasising the holistic connectivity between God, human beings and nature. Using examples of Aboriginal political struggle in the recognition of land and water rights, I argue that the freedom of Indigenous peoples to cultural self-determination and spiritual well being is undermined by both the mainstream institutional and popular dismissal of Aboriginal spirituality as a continued potent force in social and ecological responsibility.

Peter T Chang

p.chang@latrobe.edu.au

La Trobe University, Bendigo

Bishop Joseph Butler and Freedom of Conscience

Conscience, Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752 CE) declares, is a person's supreme moral guide. While affirming its' superiority Butler also concedes to conscience's fallibility. This raises the dilemma of how to reconcile conscience's authority and its susceptibility to errors. Are people at liberty, on conscience's account, to propound 'conscientious' opinions, even erroneous ones? And does that freedom to hold diverse and mistaken viewpoints lend to subjectivism?

Butler, I show, responds to the predicament by framing the moral order into two levels, i.e. primary and secondary. The former represents beliefs Butler regards as 'more determinate', i.e. all people are assumed to have clear comprehension. He then treats these as foundational norms and he enforces them resolutely, allowing no compromises. A person's moral viewpoints, even conscientious one,

cannot violate these primary norms. The secondary represents doctrines Butler regards as 'less determinate', i.e. people's comprehensions of these subjects are ambiguous. He then treats these as supplementary norms, enforcing them tentatively and allowing for differences of opinions. A person's divergent viewpoints on these secondary norms, even erroneous ones, are tolerated. Butler's two-tiered framework, I explain, allows him to affirm people's freedom to hold diverse and erroneous opinions. In so doing some subjectivism is conceded. Yet Butler, I submit, is able to contain this (subjectivism) by limiting the permissible erroneous viewpoints to the secondary order. And in maintaining the primary order resolutely Butler ensures that the tolerance accorded to people's freedom of conscience to propound subjective viewpoints does not degenerate into extreme relativism.

Nicholas Coleman

Nicholas.coleman@Wesleycollege.net

Wesley College, Melbourne

Nature, freedom and God: a way out of Plato's Cave

Anticipating the Warshawski's blockbuster movie *The Matrix* (1999) by 2400 years, Plato suggested that ordinary people living their daily lives in the material world were somehow victims of a believable illusion. Plato's allegory of "The Cave" illustrates his understanding of the illusion and his vision of the truth about reality.

Plato tells of cave dwellers who believe that shadows they see moving across the rear wall are substantial entities. The cave people spend their lives studying those fleeting images in an effort to understand themselves and the obvious world before them. All the while they are oblivious to the presence of a bonfire behind them which provides the necessary conditions for seeing anything at all. As Plato explains his parable, the 2-D shadow-play is a metaphor for the empirical world, the flickering bonfire that sheds light on the 3-D realm inside The Cave represents discursive reason, and the enduring sunshine that enlightens the domain outside The Cave symbolises the eternal radiance of spiritual consciousness.

A certain perspective is required to see the ordinary empirical world as an empty play of shadows. Various subtleties in Plato's allegory draw attention to that perspective. Once secured, other allegorical elements indicate the subtle nature of consciousness by means of which the obvious empirical world is known. By dematerializing and defragmenting the contents of ordinary consciousness, the true spiritual nature of the ordinary empirical world is revealed.

The aim of this paper is to demythologise Plato's parable by explaining its imagery in terms of everyday thought-processes. A constant stream of consciousness illuminates the empirical world. By retracing that subtle stream to its ultimate source in the divine, a way is found out of Plato's Cave into the ceaseless light of spiritual reality.

Doru Costache

dcostache@sagotc.edu.au

St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College

Theology and Natural Sciences in St Gregory Palamas

St Gregory Palamas demonstrated in his later work *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* how deeply he was acquainted with the scientific theories of antiquity and his own time. Also, he proved to have a balanced understanding of, and critical appreciation for, the natural sciences. Along with this generous view of secular knowledge, he designed a complex framework for the assessment of competencies and interactions between theology and science.

The main standpoints he defended in his earlier debates with the humanists (such as the natural incapacity of the human mind to explore the transcendent realm and to comprehend the parameters of mystical experience) were still very much present in the Chapters. Yet, in this less polemical approach, Palamas acknowledged the aptitude of natural sciences to scrutinise the architecture of the world. He had clearly pointed out, however, that although competent in matters related to this cursory order of being, the sciences have nothing relevant to say about the mystical experience.

My paper will give a general presentation of the Chapters, followed by the exploration of the main points of interest related to science and theology. In conclusion it will emphasise the relevance of the Palamite view to the contemporary dilemmas concerning the function and purpose of the conversations between scientists and theologians.

Lyn Daff

lyn.daff@avondale.edu.au

Avondale College

Conversations About God - Does Skills Training Make a Difference?

Sometimes Christians are known as either pushy and intrusive, or insular and exclusive. Neither of these extremes portrays Christianity in a positive light or creates interest in the claims of Christianity. The way that Christians relate, influences the perception that others have of Christianity. For God centred conversations to be relevant in contemporary culture, listening is just as important as speaking, for if we seek first to understand others then we are more likely to have meaningful discussions with them. In seeking to understand others our conversation with them can be in tune with their needs. This paper proposes that relevant discussion about God grows out of the relationships we establish with our acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours, friends and relatives. As the well worn quote states, "people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care".

Interpersonal skills training can change the way we relate to others, enabling us to move away from both the pushy and the insular to being relaxed and inclusive. This paper considers the effectiveness of one such training course conducted by a Christian leadership training organisation. Participants are interviewed and they report on their level of interpersonal skills before and after the completion of training. They also explain the impact that skill development has made on their interactions with others both generally and from a spiritual perspective. This research will give insight into the effectiveness of such training to not only increase interpersonal skills but also to be noticeable in the way participants' interact with others.

David Dockrill and Godfrey Tanner (+ 2002)

David.Dockrill@newcastle.edu.au

University of Newcastle

John Pearson and Henry More's Deceiving God: Scepticism and the Boundaries of Salvation

This paper has a scholarly and a theological concern. The scholarly interest relates to the 1664 Commencement Lecture at the University of Cambridge by John Pearson (1613-86), Lady Margaret Professor Divinity. Pearson, like others appointed to chairs in divinity in the Restoration University, was a learned and determined High Churchman opposed to non-conformists and dissenters from the re-established Church of England. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church describes him as "perhaps the most erudite and profound divine of a learned and theological age." In his Commencement Address Pearson attacks an unnamed scholar who had argued that God deceives devout members of other faiths into believing that their religious life contributes to towards their salvation even though they are not redeemed by their faith but by the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Pearson knew that Henry More, a leading figure amongst the Cambridge Platonists, was the author of these views. They were to be found in More's wide ranging christology, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660). More, like his fellow Christian Platonists and other liberal theologians, was concerned with the salvific prospects of those who were not within reach of the Christian gospel. Unlike most of his colleagues, however, More, a great admirer of Origen, drew upon his mentor's acceptance of divine deception in certain cases and was faced with the need to protect himself against the force of Pearson's criticism. This particular issue, one of a number of bitter conflicts between the Cambridge High Churchmen and the Platonists, became lost to sight until 1844 when an historically minded theologian, E.Churton, published some of Pearson's works including the unpublished Commencement Addresses. Churton was highly perplexed by the views that Pearson attacked and the identity of their source. Like other theologians of his generation and generations before him, he probably had not read More's *Grand Mystery of Godliness*. The problem More sought to address, however, still remains and problematic answers to its solution, such as Rahner's concept of the anonymous christian remain also. R.G.Tanner translated Pearson's address.

Anne Elvey

anne.elvey@arts.monash.edu.au

United Faculty of Theology and Monash University

The ecological necessity of forgiveness as freedom: between Luke's divine necessity and Plumwood's ecophilosophical critique of a logic of mastery

In an ecological context, where our destructive actions affect more than human others, what does forgiveness entail? The late Australian ecophilosopher Val Plumwood critiques dualism (or hyperseparation) as the logic of colonisation. This colonising logic has effects not only on human

communities but also on land, air and water. In her description of dualism, Plumwood describes a hyperseparation between nature and humans (and nature and culture) that is replayed in a number of other dualisms, including that of necessity and freedom. But necessity and freedom need not be rendered dualistically. In the category of forgiveness, the Gospel of Luke offers an alternative worldview. While Luke's gospel has its own categories of difference, for example, master and slave, rich and poor, which are sometimes rendered dualistically (or nearly so), Luke's understanding of divine necessity unavoidably includes forgiveness. Moreover, the metaphorical and etymological context supporting the category of forgiveness in Luke is that of freedom (from prison and debt). How might Luke's understanding of forgiveness inform the kind of environmental culture toward which Plumwood's ecophilosophy bids us turn?

David Everingham

dce80@uow.edu.au

Gwynneville

Evil and the End of the World

In this paper, I argue for some adjustments of the propositions constituting the Problem of Evil. I argue that the existing explanations for the existence of evil fail, and offer an alternative resolution of it that is based on the tenet that the existence of evil was not explicitly intended by God. I argue a position on how and why evil came into existence, and on the reason for the existence of the physical creation. This view of why we exist I argue to be inconsistent with a despairing expectation that human sinfulness must inevitably lead to humanity destroying itself.

George Garnsey

jagarnsey@harboursat.com.au

Morpeth NSW

Kenneth Escott Kirk as an ethicist and moral theologian

The study of ethics has a long history. This is partly because of the tension (that many have noted) between "what is, and what ought to be". People are still interested in values, and in seeking to define the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. The search for an adequate philosophy of life is common to all, or is within the reach of all.

Many Christian writers have paid a great deal of attention to these things. Among those who lived in the twentieth century was Kenneth Escott Kirk, (1886-1954) in his time Regius Professor of Moral Theology at the University of Oxford and Bishop of Oxford. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (1959 edition) described him as "the most outstanding of modern Anglican writers on moral theology and Christian spirituality" This paper is part of an attempt to assess this claim.

Gerald Gleeson

gerald18@bigpond.net.au

Catholic Institute of Sydney

What is Natural Law Theory a Theory of?

The relationships between God, freedom and nature are central to different version of a natural law ethic. This paper will compare and contrast different approaches to natural law (and different accounts of the relationships between God, freedom and nature) by asking what is natural law theory a theory of? (Or: To what question is natural law supposed to be an answer?) My account of the different types of natural law theory will be tested in relation to some contemporary issues in bioethics.

Thomas Green

tgre9767@usyd.edu.au

University of Sydney

Spinoza to Leibniz: From a free man and an omnipresent God to a free world and absent God-Methods of the Monads.

This paper argues that based on Leibniz's theory of Monads God does not have to be present in the world-thus shattering the omnipresent delusion and allowing free will not only to individuals but also to the world itself. I first present Spinoza's work on natural laws and his argument that natural laws are analogous to God. Through this Spinoza is able to argue that humans are without free will. I argue that both Spinoza and Leibniz's ontology are characterised by their emphasis on idealism, however, Spinoza's doctrine is dissimilar in the respect that his ontology requires a rigorous pantheism. Leibniz,

however can allow for a view of the world not emphasised by god thanks to his introduction of monads.

I then introduce Leibniz's concept of Monads, and applying them to the physical world I argue that the laws, or 'character' of the Monads are established and then the Monads are left to run into the best possible world they can. Towards the end of the paper I argue that the question of God's existence whereas important in explaining the initial creation of the Monads is not a question which is relevant or even necessary in explaining the course of the worlds events as Monads operate under their own will.

Luke Holohan

l.holohan@campion.edu.au

Campion College Australia

Prophetic and dialectical? A public Church's quest for an effective engagement with culture

During the twentieth century, the Church developed a strong social voice in the midst of a post-Enlightenment climate of individualism and fragmentation. Christian theology confidently asserted that religious values must feature prominently in matters of public discourse. Its rationale was that the deepest political questions have a theological underpinning, dependent as they are on answers to the question of what constitutes the ultimate horizon in relation to which social rights and political legitimacy are determined. The emerging concept of a public Church was based on firm theological foundations but significant differences have arisen in regard to how the reign of God in human affairs is to be understood.

This paper will analyse the contrasting approach to this question by two influential schools of fundamental theology, contemporary German political theology and radical orthodoxy, which respectively endorse and reject the notion of theology engaging with the social sciences. At the heart of the schools' divergent views about the value of recognizing the autonomy of the secular order is a different understanding of how grace is related to nature, which has implications for how we are to understand divine and human freedom. In appropriating the insights of either school, the Church needs to be mindful that its interventions on socio-political questions may be judged by many to be tendentious, given the ideological underpinnings of social analysis, or else that they will be so dismissive of the possibility of secular achievement as to be of little assistance to those faced with the complexities of statecraft. It will be argued, however, that the Church should prudently integrate its social teachings with relevant social and economic data if its prophetic insights are to have widespread practical impact.

Mark Johnson

mrj@pnc.com.au

Sydney University's School of Religion

Against Inviolacy : Apophaticism as Freedom For Incompleteness.

Inter-subjectivity has become the dominant schematic within which much current discussion about the subject takes place. But despite the emphasis upon otherness that is key to current discussions about subjectivity a particular hybrid of the subject is what actually impacts upon our world. The legitimating inviolacy of the cogito enables such a subject to act over and against world, others, God, constructing and subjecting each in its own lifeless image. For many, the legitimations of inviolacy have manifested as unbridled aspiration, exponential profit seeking and the cultivation of those hopes of completeness that can only be realized in commodity gratifications and the instrumental usage of the world via technology. The subject's insatiable grasp for the mirage of wholeness and the related identities offered has resulted in the compulsive consumption and calculative manipulation of all limits, whether of natural resources, fragile ecosystems, or the obstacle of the other.

This paper seeks to celebrate the freedom of incompleteness: of completion as incompleteness and of experience as non-experience. This paper seeks to advocate not just for an apophatic discourse, but for Language as inherently apophatic and therefore as the necessary limit condition by and through which human being can realize itself and its intrinsic freedom. The silences and darkness of apophaticism enables the possibilities with which to freely recognise and engage with the freedom of otherness, whether that be the transcendent otherness of God, the otherness of neighbour, or the otherness of nature, each of which have long been erased by their being subsumed by the insatiability of subjective instrumentality, by the determining pathology of wholeness.

With the assistance of such contemporary contributions by Heidegger, Levinas and Marion, and also a selection of insights from Eriugena, Bonaventure, Beguine writers, Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, I shall indicate how it is that the inviolate subject is ruinous to life, and how it is that apophaticism – too long suspect and derided by the diverse disciples of calculative reasoning – enables the freedom inherent to life.

A.B. Kelly (Tony)

anthonykelly@internode.on.net

Flinders University

Loneragan, Emergent Evolution and the Cosmic Process.

Cosmologists ask: "Why is there anything at all?" This search for God's motive for creation begins with Aristotle, who almost solves the problem. God's motive becomes clear when Samuel Alexander's and Bernard Lonergan's concepts are brought to bear on Aristotle's original insight. Lonergan proposes a cosmic process that develops from stage to stage, with each stage of the process exhibiting greater freedom than the preceding stage, leading to the freedom of humanity to restructure both itself and the world.

An examination of the nature of the cosmic process to date, together with a consideration of God's motive for Creation, shows that the purpose of the cosmic process is to make possible the self-creation of new aspects of the being of a created entity, to enable that entity to make itself similar to God. God cannot create an entity that is similar to God. God can only create creatures. But God can initiate a cosmic process that can produce intelligent animal species. Such a species could develop itself in both goodness and creativity, making it similar to God and an appropriate subject of God's love. Recognition of this purpose resolves Aristotle's antinomy of creation.

God initiates the cosmic process but is necessarily "hands-off" the process once it has been initiated. The Big Bang provides the Energy, the Time and the mathematical cosmic constants that make planet Earth, its life and evolution possible. The cosmic process is self-organising at the Emergent Stages of Matter and of Life and is self-creating at the Emergent Stage of Mind and at the Human Moral-cultural Emergent Stage. Humanity is the original "Do it yourself" kit.

Gerard Kelly

gkelly@cis.catholic.edu.au

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Historical Jesus Studies and Talk about God

This paper will consider the question of whether historical Jesus studies have helped people talk about God. The old distinction between the 'Christ of faith' and the 'Jesus of history' seemed to predict an irreversible gap between Christian faith and the results of scientific study. The rise of certain fundamentalisms might suggest that in some sections of contemporary culture that prediction has come true. The paper will consider some recent christologies and evaluate their success or otherwise in resolving the dilemma between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith'.

Dimitri Kepreotes

sapress@greekorthodox.org.au

St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College

'Orthodox Canon Law - a challenge to God-given freedom'

The mere term 'law' in a Christian context may seem, at best, superfluous to the Old Testament Law which has already been fulfilled in Christ and, at worst, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

A brief examination of the centuries-old *history*, *categories* and *purpose* of Orthodox Canon Law raises philosophical issues about the nature of human freedom, and how this might be understood by Christians in the 21st Century.

Vital questions arise, such as: Are the Canons, by definition, a challenge or even a hindrance to personal freedom? Who decides as to their validity or applicability in a post-modern world? Is it meaningful to talk about them in terms of soteriology?

This paper seeks to respond by looking at how freedom, both personal and communal, is understood according to the ethos of the Orthodox Church.

That Church Canons are designed to enhance rather than hinder human freedom will hopefully be shown as a matter of sound deduction.

John Lamont

jlamont@cis.catholic.edu.au

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Plantinga's Molinism and Molina's Molinism

Alvin Plantinga, in his seminal *The Nature of Necessity*, presented a view that has been accepted as a revival of the divine middle knowledge postulated by Luis de Molina. There are however substantial differences between the Molinism discussed by Plantinga and other analytic philosophers of religion,

and the Molinism of Molina himself. A crucial difference is that for Plantinga and analytic interpreters of Molina like Freddoso, God's middle knowledge is taken to be contingent; its contents vary between possible worlds. For Molina, however, the content of God's middle knowledge is the same in every possible world. The paper shows how the analytic interpretation of Molina is mistaken, discusses the differing roles that Plantinga's middle knowledge and Molina's middle knowledge play in their respective systems, and indicate the differing problems that the two conceptions of middle knowledge face.

Ronald S. Laura and Rachel Buchanan

Ronald.Laura@newcastle.edu.au

University of Newcastle

rachel.buchanan@optusnet.com.au

Set Free by the Word of God? : Critical Reflections on the Relationships amongst Man, Woman, and Nature in Christian Theology

'[t]here is no longer male and female; for all you are one in Jesus Christ' Gal 3:28

Within the New Testament Jesus' life provides a model of connectivity with nature, and in word and deed he affirms that men and women are equal in the sight of God. Thus, Jesus' teachings challenge the idea that women are in essence a natural resource to be expropriated and manipulated to accommodate the vested interests of men. However, certain of his disciplines and the Early Church Fathers were not able to jettison their own cultural impedimenta to overthrow the previous Judaic and misogynistic view of women in society. The burden of this paper is to show that although Christ's message is one of love for everyone, regardless of race or gender, biblical literature and other historical documents betray a biblical basis for a form of what Laura has elsewhere called 'patriarchal theism'. Within the context of this plausible interpretative framework there has emerged a socio-cultural hierarchy that not only places man above woman and nature but situates him closer to God. Man, we shall argue, is encouraged to express his dominion over nature through the development of technology, while woman is considered, not unlike nature, to be an utilitarian resource that can be expropriated by, and subjugated to the will of man. While Christ's message and the life he lived clearly demonstrate the universality of God's love made manifest without discrimination to either sex, history demonstrates that the Church has been unable to jettison certain patriarchal precepts of the Old Testament, as on the ongoing and present day debate of the ordination of women in some churches attests, to cite just one topical example.

Within the Bible there exists a certain degree of ambiguity in regards to the status of women and the environment. We shall in the present piece urge that the notion of man's separateness from nature is implicitly encouraged in certain Old Testament stories that describe God as giving man dominion over the earth and all creatures within it. On this interpretation of the matter women can plausibly be regarded as just another of nature's resources over which man rules with authority. Within the Judaic-Christian tradition the primary rationale for this perspective is located within, not limited to Genesis. The idea that women are a form of 'property' is found within other chapters also, and revealed in stories of the exchange of women as if they were goods to be bought and sold.

Once the implicit presumptions of patriarchal theism are made explicit, it is easier to recognise that the historical connections between nature and women are inextricably linked to the conceptual connections which have come to identify them. These connections, or value dualisms, reveal a covert commitment to structure of domination that depict women and nature in ways that are distinctly male biased. . Value dualisms now come to represent normative categories of judgemental discernment, making them as invidious tool for the continued marginalisation of women and nature.

Ronald S. Laura and Amy Chapman

University of Newcastle

amy.chapman@studentmail.newcastle.edu.au

Towards Establishing a Theistic Presumption of Epistemology in Environmental Education

We shall argue that there are epistemological grounds for ensuring that the provision of environmental education should at one and the same time constitute a form of religious education. Environmental education which remains ungrounded in a theistic presumption of epistemology, will lead ineluctably to an anthropocentric posturing in which 'mankind' stands as separate from nature and in desperate need of its forging technologies for dominance and control. Because these anthropocentric posturings are driven by a lust for power and this obsession with control, we argue that the dominant paradigm of science is undergirded by an epistemological presumption of power that seats itself as a boundary condition within human consciousness which is inimical to the ostensible goals of environmental education. In essence the tension that results is tantamount to a battle of principalities, good against

evil, with the mindless destruction of the living world on the one hand, as opposed to its loving stewardship, sustenance and protection on the other.

In an effort to bring to bold relief any obscurity in this epigrammatic sketch we reinterpret the story of the Garden of Eden not so much as a past event, as an ongoing unfolding of the dynamic framework of consciousness within which 'man' struggles to play God.

This being so, our interactions with nature are subsumed under our technological attempts to reconstruct the world to make it oblige more readily to submit to our will.

This value is now ensconced within education covertly as a feature of the hidden agenda which defines the more general goals of education itself. Given that our technological interventions are implicitly designed to recast the 'living face of God's creation' in such a way that we more readily gain control over it by making it increasingly chemicalised, inert and dead, the theological question needs to be asked from the educational perspective, 'whose work are we doing?'

Ronald S. Laura and Robert C Chalender

Ronald.Laura@newcastle.edu.au

The University of Newcastle

Robert.Chalender@studentmail.newcastle.edu.au

Patriarchal Theism and the Anti-Feminist Biblical Presumption: As It Defines Women and Nature

The Judeo-Christian attitude towards women and nature is not presented unequivocally within the context of Biblical literature. There are many reasons for this; some are exegetical, some theological and social-cultural, while other reasons are epistemological. Whatever reasons might seem to explain the diversity of attitude to be found on this subject, our purpose in this paper is to show that sufficient evidence exists to establish a case for a powerful biblical moral presupposition which we shall call 'patriarchal theism'. The use we make of this term is straightforward. By patriarchal theism we mean that there is present within the Bible a way of describing the world and the divine events which take place in it which explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, encourages a way of thinking about nature and woman that presupposes the superiority and authority of the men over both. Just as the Jews are God's chosen people, so man is God's chosen gender. The authors acknowledge that this way of putting the point stands to some extent as a provocative caricature, but it is our purpose to bring to bold relief that the ongoing rape of nature and women in the western world can be explained partly by the form of 'gender elitism' covertly legitimized by patriarchal theism.

To tease out the actiology of patriarchal theism and its impact on the ensuing treatment of women and nature we begin and largely end in this paper with a transdisciplinary analysis of the creation story. Our rationale for focusing so finally on the book of Genesis is not because it is the only place in the Bible where patriarchal theism is manifest, but rather because the representation of it in Genesis is pivotal in understanding why Biblical passages elsewhere can be and have been interpreted with the patriarchal site of intellectual hand. Given this methodological limitation the argument of the paper is intended as an heuristic to stimulate further but more informed discussion on the conceptual connections that have been made between women and nature and why the descriptions given to them in the context of patriarchal theism lead to ways of conceptualizing them that contribute to institutional sanctions and forms of social behaviour destructive of both.

Megan Levy

mlevy2@nd.edu.au

The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle Campus

An Authentic Human Being with a 17th C. Flair Fenelon Spiritual Letters and Existentialism

This is an invitation for the mind and the heart to cross the threshold into another dimension in time and explore the parallels between Existential Psychotherapy concepts and Fenelon's Christian Spiritual Letters written 300 years ago.

Christianity and Existentialism are "individualistic" approaches focused on self-awareness, self-responsibility, and ownership to facilitate personal change. Both ask for commitment, and none of them offers easy ways or painless quests. Centred on the individual they advocate inner growth to improve relationships with self and others.

The Existentialist process of inner growth and fulfilment of potentialities is known as Self-Actualization. Maslow (1987) describes the self-actualizer as one who, putting aside personal wishes and neurotic needs, encounters life and others with an innate directional positive force demonstrated by selflessness, spontaneous thinking and behaviour, high levels of empathy, full sympathy, social interest, identification with the oppressed, and compassionate care for humankind and nature. Sounds like Jesus?

If the answer is yes, then we could say that Christian spiritual letters are a personal growth tool rooted on a self-actualized man, and that Fenelon's added bonus over Existentialism is identifying God as the innate directional positive force Maslow talks about.

Patrick J. McInerney

patrickmcinerney@columban.org.au

Columban Mission Institute

God, the architect of human freedom and religion its servant

I am in the final stages of a PhD on Christian responsibility in interreligious relations. I have been using the approach of Bernard Lonergan, and have found it a very useful tool for negotiating the complex issues of interfaith relations. I would like to share some of the fruits of my research.

I am particularly interested in the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom. It is this very freedom that brings about the diversity of the world religions, and yet they are all under the sovereignty of God. How to reconcile these two seemingly opposite positions?

I am also interested in the related issue of religion and spirituality, how spirituality gives life, and how religion institutionalizes spirituality; yet spirituality without religion is formless, and religion without spirituality is dead. I suggest that this issue of the relation between spirituality and religion is the practical expression in our communal human living of the more abstract issue of God's sovereignty and human freedom.

I propose to show how Lonergan's analysis of the dynamics of consciousness shed light on these issues, and provides guidelines for how authentic religion promotes genuine human freedom, in contrast to inauthentic religion that promises illusory freedoms that in fact ensnare human creativity.

Shane Mackinlay

smackinlay@ctc.edu.au

Catholic Theological College

Can a Free Agora be Value-free?

In contemporary Western societies like Australia, it is largely accepted that a liberal democracy must also be secular. Therefore, the state should not seek to determine the values or religious beliefs of its citizens, but should instead be concerned with creating and protecting an open public space in which citizens are free to shape their lives according to a plurality of personal values and beliefs. The state's role should be restricted to protecting the neutrality of the public space and preventing harm being done to individuals. In some versions of this account, the neutrality of the public space is used to argue that debates about social and political policy must also be value-free, actively excluding principles derived from religious beliefs, and relegating them to a strictly private domain. Such a view simultaneously elevates individual autonomy and excludes core dimensions of the person from the public space, making it impossible to determine questions of right and wrong by anything other than democratic consensus.

In this paper I will argue that a public space that allows free choice and expression of values and religious beliefs cannot itself be value-free. On the contrary, it presumes an affirmation of a very particular set of values. Further, drawing on an analysis of recent French disputes about *laïcité* and on Pope Benedict XVI's comments on freedom during this year's visit to the USA, I will argue that the free public space of a liberal democratic society is compatible with citizens having personal values and beliefs, and is in fact enhanced by recognising that principles arising from these beliefs make a valuable contribution to public debate. Not only is the freedom of the *agora* not value-free, it is also enriched by the values and beliefs held by individuals within it.

Leah McMurry

s4060368@student.uq.edu.au

University of Queensland

A Question of Reincarnation from a Materialist Perspective

Materialism has been historically revered within scientific fields as the central metaphysical construct of the universe. Its ancient origin is found in Greece where the theory of atomism was first articulated by Leucippus and Democritus. The basis of atomism rests on the notion of indivisible magnitudes, the idea that matter is made up of many tiny impenetrable elements i.e. atoms. A well-known follower of this metaphysical tradition is the famous ethicist Epicurus, whose extensive works in ethics prevented him from writing a full account of his amended atomistic metaphysics before his life ended. Instead, a loyal student named Lucretius wrote a six-book philosophical prose in Latin in order to detail the metaphysical workings of the atomism that Epicurus envisioned. Along with the universal elements of simply atoms and the void advanced by the first atomists, the metaphysics of Epicurean philosophy

includes the added elemental movement of 'the swerve.' Lucretius' poem entitled *De Rerum Natura* translated into 'On the Nature of Things' is the only account known that gives details of the workings of the mysterious swerve. It is interpreted as the metaphysical operation of free will within the atomistic system, as it is the alternative movement of atoms besides falling vertically throughout the void or colliding with other atoms. It is the notion of the swerve that enables an argument to be made for a possibly freely willed movement of one's spirit atoms or *anima* after experiencing death providing the person is strong-willed or has maintained an appropriate ethical disposition by living the Epicurean ideals of the good life. This parallels the moral notions of Buddhism, whereby strength of will and moral knowledge determine one's fate in the afterlife.

By seeking to maintain the central argument of Lucretius that freedom from the fear of death is the highest good, an argument is be found within the basic metaphysical propositions Lucretius advanced on the nature of atoms, for a perspective of reincarnation. An afterlife can be perceived for the persistence of one's *anima* throughout time, be the atoms randomly dispersed amongst the void and/or other living things, or essentially reincarnated as the core *anima* of another living creature. By giving a possible perspective of a materialist afterlife, then any counter-active fears of looming and finite death may be smothered. If Lucretius had given this possible perspective, then historically Epicureanism may have been classed as a religion.

Anthony Maher

amaher@cis.catholic.edu.au

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Pope Benedict XVI and Human Freedom

The 1968 student riots could be said to be epoch defining. In recognition of their 40th anniversary, this paper will offer an insight into Pope Benedict's understanding of human freedom and its pastoral theological nexus, orthopraxis. In so doing, it will briefly outline the historical context of Joseph Ratzinger's early formation in Nazi Germany and his position leading into the Second Vatican Council. The paper will also briefly assess the impact of the student riots on Ratzinger in 1968, and contrast this event with later experiences, particularly as Prefect of the SCDF and Roman Pontiff.

Appropriating Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and Eric Erikson's identity hypothesis, in relation to developmental psychology, stages and personality, the paper will also consider David Schultenover's anthropological methodology, to put forward a reflection on the perceptions of the Bavarian mind.

Finally, in an effort to determine if the evidence suggests an evolutionary position in Benedict's thought, the paper will explore aspects of four pivotal communiqués, in the form of SCDF Instructions and Papal encyclicals, in which Benedict XVI nee Cardinal Ratzinger, articulated his position on human freedom:

1. 'Instruction On Certain Aspects of The Theology of Liberation' (1984);
2. 'Instruction On Christian Freedom and Liberation' (1986);
3. 'Deus Caritas Est' (2005)
4. 'Spe Salvi' (2007)

Greg Melleuish

gmelleui@uow.edu.au

University of Wollongong

A Meditation on Secularisation

The idea of secularisation remains a contested idea in discussions of the nature of contemporary society, in particular Western society. The idea of secularisation rests on a nineteenth century idea of progress whereby individuals and societies move from a 'religious' to a 'secular' state. Yet it is unclear what it means to be 'religious' and what it means to be 'secular' and why there should be an historical connection between the two. In many ways the secularisation debate goes to the core of what it means to be human.

It would seem that secularisation is related to a particular rationalist orientation to the world that can issue both in a this-worldly outlook and forms of religious fundamentalism. It is thus related to the way in which human beings place themselves in the world; the extent to which they are willing or willing to relate their cognitive capacities to their affective and imaginative natures.

In this light I should like to explore the relationship between the 'secular' and the 'religious'. Mary Eberstadt recently argued that changes in the nature of the family precede the coming of secularisation. This suggests to me that what we call 'secularisation' is about more than just changes in our knowledge of the world. Rather the key to understanding both the 'religious' and the 'secular' lies in the way that we relate to the world in a much broader sense.

Ross Morrow

drrossmorrow@yahoo.com.au

University of Sydney,

Freedom, Nature and Sexuality

This paper will explore some of the arguments about the role and interaction of nature, society and freedom in relation to human sexuality. It will look specifically at some of the ways sexuality is understood and studied via essentialist and social constructionist perspectives and attempt to assess some of the merits and shortcomings of these views. The paper will draw on ideas from realist philosophy both as a basis for analysis and a resource for critique of these major perspectives.

Andrew Murray

apmurray@cis.catholic.edu.au

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Freedom and Nature in Aristotle's Politics

Aristotle is very aware of the human desire to be free and recognises that human beings have the ability to construct the kind of communities in which they can live freely and well. He is nevertheless aware of the limitations that nature imposes on what might be achieved. Men, he says, are neither God's nor beasts. This paper will explore the workings of freedom and nature in Aristotle's *Politics*. A pivotal issue that has to be faced is his claim that there is such a thing as a natural slave. Can this be made sense of today?

Dr David Nash

dsnash@brookes.ac.uk

Oxford Brookes University UK

Blasphemy, Tolerance and the New World of Religious Conflict: An Historian's View

Blasphemy as a crime and a social phenomenon has had a startlingly enduring history in the West. Within the last twenty years it has risen from relative obscurity to become a major source of conflict centring around religion and belief. Moreover its presence is wide and varied since it exists in laws, in the theology of religions of the book and as a transgressive act between individuals. This lecture argues that we can only understand and appreciate this phenomenon by approaching it through an historical perspective. Through almost seven hundred years blasphemy has mutated and adapted enabling it to survive into the twentieth century. Whilst it began as an authoritarian method of disciplining the thoughts and actions of unruly populations it survived far beyond this imperative. In doing so its persistence into the twentieth century (the century of rights and freedoms) has become an internalised form of protection for beliefs and feelings. Arguably it has also, regrettably, become a primary medium of communication between religious groups in conflict and is reached for more readily than was once the case. This historical journey and its progress offers significant challenges to many theoretical positions that explain changes in culture, crime, the perception of identity and civilisation. Through a range of (especially modern) examples we can analyse how blasphemy has been used as a means of affirming as much as denying religious beliefs and identities. We can also observe blasphemy's operation within societies as either 'passive' or 'active' which offers a framework of explanation for its presence within past societies and the present. This also informs us about the fundamental change in the identity of the blasphemer from unruly miscreant, to political radical – ending finally in the modern identity of the blasphemer (primarily) as artist, writer or performer. The lecture will conclude by offering some suggestions about how religions (and religious individuals) might wish to rethink their relationship with blasphemy and thus draw back from future conflict.

Keynote Lecture

John O'Neill

jto@hotkey.net.au

Pelaw Main NSW

An Exploration of Ken Wilber's Post-Metaphysical Spirituality

I will give a brief history of the life and work, of Ken Wilber, whom I regard as one of the world's greatest living philosophers, especially his major works, the 5 stages of the development of his thought and the Integral Institute founded by him.. This will include an exposition of Wilber's framework, his integral map, which includes 4 quadrants, states, and stages.

I regard Wilber as one of the world's greatest living philosophers. He discusses the Great Chain of Being as a description of levels of being (ontology) as well as levels of knowing (epistemology) He takes it that metaphysics assumed that these levels of reality existed and then went about using them to explain the world, with concepts such as God, the soul, liberation and suffering. He asserts that with

the critical turn in postmodern philosophy these assumptions can no longer be defended. His claim is that an Integral Post-Metaphysics can account for all the necessary ingredients of metaphysics without these assumptions and baggage.

For him the Great Chain (or Great Hierarchy) of Being and Knowing was a way various philosophers and sages used to interpret their mystical experiences. For Wilber these levels of reality are not pre-existing structures waiting to be discovered but in part are co-structures of the knowing subject, of human consciousness. He claims that the verification methods for the existence of these structures of consciousness can no longer involve merely asserting their existence because tradition says so, nor base their existence on introspection or meditation. Instead they will need to involve some version of both modernity's demand for objective evidence and post-modernity's demand for inter-subjective grounding. Otherwise we have either merely a given mythology or the myth of the given (claims that pretend to be free from culture). He asserts that the structures of consciousness cannot be conceived as ones that are given eternally or timelessly. Rather, these post-metaphysical levels of being and knowing would have to be conceived as forms that have developed in time, evolution and history. He sees that the forms that have been around the longest are more rigid and set in their ways, while the newer and more emerging forms still leave plenty of room for creativity, freedom and novelty as Kosmic (his term) habits or memories. His appealing Grand Canyon analogy is relevant here. He provides an explanation for the existence of levels or structures of consciousness that relies minimally on metaphysical thinking. He does rely on some evolutionary givens. I will provide a mild critique of his use of the term post-metaphysical. Wilber's thoughts about God, human development and evolution have much to contribute to our understanding of the relationships between God, freedom and nature.

John F Owens

owens@gsc.ac.nz

Good Shepherd College, Auckland, NZ

Created Natures and the Primacy of Freedom: Richard Rorty's Critique of the Tradition

One of the more interesting debates in contemporary philosophy concerns the status of the thesis the Medievals called "the truth of things", the view that not only are there things in the world, but there is also a preferred view of them, a way they should be seen if they are to be seen rightly. For the Middle Ages, the thesis helped ground the Aristotelian position on things as natural kinds, entities whose varied activities and histories go back to a set of principles which do not change. In recent decades Richard Rorty has mounted a significant challenge to this position, seeing it as fundamentally dependent on a belief in God, and losing its force and plausibility once this belief declines. In its place, a concern with "freedom" rather than "truth" should become the primary determinant of a culture. The paper will outline elements of this controversy, suggesting that Rorty's critique overlooks the key place of teleology in the Aristotelian account, and that the metaphysical tradition looks more promising once this notion is recovered.

David Pohlmann and Garth Hentzschel

dpohlmann@chc.edu.au

Christian Heritage College

State School Chaplaincy: Talking about God in Contemporary Culture

Post-modernism in western culture seems to have brought with it a growing disinterest in traditional religion. As a result, many in the West have abandoned the religious meta-narratives that they might once have relied upon to provide some understanding of their world. This is evident within religious trends in Australia and especially so within the Christian tradition. While most of those still identifying as Christian are affiliated with traditional denominations, these denominations are not keeping up with population growth, some are in clear decline, and many Christian denominations now reflect an older demographic than is apparent within the general Australian population.

In contrast to this trend towards a diminishing interest in institutional religion, state school chaplaincy services have been embraced throughout Australia and New Zealand. With their advent in 1955, and their consistent growth during the 1980s and 1990s, the more recent and rapid expansion of state school chaplaincy across the nation cannot be fully understood by the recent Federal Government's funding program. This paper argues that there is a significant theological component to this growth. While young people are greatly under-represented in Australian churches, more and more young people have positive contact with Christian chaplains in public schools. The approach taken by chaplains in state schools seems to be more acceptable to contemporary culture than more traditional approaches to youth ministry. This paper argues that the incarnational approach, evident in state school chaplaincy, is authentically Christian and at the same time responds positively to Australian

culture influenced by postmodernism and the expectations of generation Y. Such an approach to practical theology offers young Australians the freedom to experience God within their natural culture.

Greg Restall

restall@unimelb.edu.au

University of Melbourne

Molinism and the Thin Red Line

For Molinists, the future is unsettled. However, God's middle knowledge -- contingent knowledge of what agents would freely do in this or that circumstance -- underwrites God's omniscience. In this paper rehearse Nuel Belnap and Mitchell Green's argument in "Indeterminism and the Thin Red Line" against the reality of a specific future in the context of branching time (Philosophical Perspectives, 1994), and show that it applies equally well to Molinism. In the process, we show how contemporary work in the logic of temporal notions in the context of branching time (specifically, Prior-Thomason semantics) can illuminate discussions in the metaphysics of freedom and divine knowledge.

Susanna G. Rizzo

s.rizzo@campion.edu.au

Campion College Australia

The Religious foundations of 'secular' hermeneutics and epistemology: debunking the secularisation myth.

Has there ever been such a thing as 'secularisation'? And what is meant by secularisation? What is its relation with modernity? Is secularisation a myth or a fictitious account? Is it an exclusively western or western-induced phenomenon? And should secularism be considered as an ideology or discourse rather than a process? These are some of the questions, which the current proliferation of religious movements and faiths has brought to the fore, inducing scholars of all disciplines to reconsider the validity of the secularisation thesis.

Since their formulation, the process of secularisation and its cognate ideology, secularism, have been axiomatically associated with modernity and modernisation, postulating that, as a society 'modernises', religion would gradually cease to be the guiding principle in the lives of individuals and societies. Scholars unanimously concur that the Reformation, along with the 'Wars of Religion' it sparked, is to be considered the birthplace of modernity, the dawn of the 'disenchantment of the world'. This disenchantment is teemed, however, with contradictions: while modernity, in fact, advocates the disengagement of the individual and society from religion, it rehashes and harnesses religious beliefs, values, ethics and structures to its own ends. This because 'modernity' has failed to develop a distinctive hermeneutics by which to systemise an alleged new epistemology.

This paper will argue that the concept of secularisation is based on a fictitious account of the transformation of religion in western society during the past centuries, an account which is inherently based on the identification of religion, and the measurement of its social relevance, with the development and success of its institutional forms. It will be demonstrated that secularisation is rooted in a religious discourse, common to all 'historical' religions, and is not therefore an exclusively western res or ideology. It will be shown how the epistemological tautology, produced by the secularisation discourse, becomes visible when viewed from an ontological perspective since the ontic commitments of secularisation, generated by the deep structures of its 'linguistic competence', which is religious in nature, inevitably condition its performative acts: the proliferation of New Religious movements or religious fundamentalisms, along with the 'ideology' of Postmodernism itself, appear to validate such a theory.

Brian Scarlett

brianfs@unimelb.edu.au

The University of Melbourne

Spirit, Spiritedness And Spirituality

The tripartite psychology Plato presents in The Republic identifies as one of the elements of the human psyche a feature he calls thumos This has been variously translated as the spirited element, anger, indignation, spirit, the passionate element, and more. Attempting to get clear about this yields the conclusion that thumos must have many forms because it is whatever energizes the person. This helps in the understanding of some psychological disorders, the concept of spirituality, the separation of spirituality and religion, and the evaluation of alternative spiritualities.

In the evaluation of spiritualities Plato's transcendentalist tendency, apparent also to some extent in Aristotle has been criticized as viciously other-worldly. I criticize this contention the related Freudian claim that religious faith is narcissistic.

Khaldoun Sweis

ksweis@ccc.edu

Olive-Harvey College, Chicago, USA

God in Nature: The Unscientific Presuppositions of Naturalism in Science

This paper is an attempt to show the problems of naturalism. In Part 1 I address the definitions of naturalism. In Part 2, I address the unscientific presuppositions of naturalism. In Part 3, I frame and articulate an argument against naturalism ala Alvin Plantinga and Richard Taylor, (different than the one raised by C. S. Lewis). This argument states that if our cognitive faculties have arisen by purely natural, unguided forces, then, although they can be trusted to arrive at pragmatic conclusions, they cannot be trusted to arrive at truthful conclusions. The point is that truths that have survival values are not the same as truths that are reasonable or have a purpose. Given a theistic paradigm, we can posit that our cognitive faculties were the direct or indirect result of a higher intelligence without resorting to a God in the Gaps fallacy.

Matthew John Paul Tan

mjptan@gmail.com

Australian Catholic University

Conversion/Politics

Christians place great currency on freedom. With this in mind, the Church's evangelical mission is often paralleled by attempts in establishing intercultural harmony or universal credibility as a member of civil society in the current state-centric political framework. This task of maintaining the freedom of citizens through these measures is seen as something isolated from the task of winning converts, yet compatible with its evangelical mission.

The Church cannot simultaneously carry out both these tasks. This is not because of the inconsistency of these goals, but because the current political framework's banner of freedom masks the fact that the framework is an evangelical force, converting citizens bodies into "disciples" well before the Christian Gospel reaches their minds. Remaining in civil society therefore, is to assist in the spread of a secular Gospel.

Politics is therefore fundamentally evangelical to the extent that creating and maintaining any political framework overlaps with the recruitment of people's bodies into practices that sustain political communities. Therefore, the Church's contemporary evangelical mission must be intimately tied to the task of transforming the existing political framework by creating space for a reconfiguring the bodies therein. Recognition of the link between politics and conversion via corporeal recruitment gives the Church legitimacy as a political player and allows its politics to retain its evangelical mission.

Harold Tarrant

Harold.Tarrant@newcastle.edu.au

University of Newcastle

Gods, Nature and Freedom in the Derveni Papyrus

The Derveni Papyrus, discovered in 1962 and receiving authorised publication in 2006, is a rare early papyrus (c. 340 B.C.) from the Greek mainland, discovered carbonised in a Macedonian tomb. The text may have been written c. 420 B.C. by an Orphic practitioner, who seems to be promising to the initiate a more scientific delivery from cares in the afterlife—an appropriate grave-gift. The majority of what remains is a commentary on an earlier hymn-like text, ascribed to Orpheus himself, and dealing with traditional Greek divinities, going back at least to the figure of Night. Olympians are identified with parts of the cosmos itself, Zeus being associated with air (and intelligence), while Olympus is interpreted as time. Ocean is again air, pointing at a strong tendency to identify other gods with Zeus—even Aphrodite at one point, though a number of Greek female divinities are seen as alternative names for the earth-mother principle. Though the author deals with theogonic myth, he purges the Hesiodic stories of generational violence by having the whole cosmology controlled by a coherent intelligent process. While Orphic theogony is thus seen in terms of late Presocratic, especially Anaxagorean, cosmology, such cosmology, seen as atheistic in its time, is incorporated within a meaningful religious belief, seemingly promising salvation by the scientific aversion of psychical powers that will otherwise impede us. The damaged papyrus can tell us only so much, but I shall explore a possible explanation about how the promised liberation is to be achieved.

Matthew Tones

m.tones@griffith.edu.au

Griffith University

Vattimo's Weak Thought, and the possible future of Christianity

This paper will analyse Gianni Vattimo's concept of 'Weak Thought' and its potential for a reinvigoration of Christianity after the Death of God. It will be argued that Weak Thought implores a democratic dialogue with all religions, but not without issue.

Vattimo cites Nietzsche's doctrine of the Death of God as the crucial moment in western history when God takes the form of man, negating the Platonic model of Truth and in the process entrusting interpretation to the worldly. This act makes discourses of 'Truth' illegitimate products of power. It is argued that when these discourses are 'Weakened,' religious discourses can re-emerge as legitimate political voices. Hence, far from being the death of spirituality, the Death of God creates the conditions for a possible renewal.

It will be argued that the Christian value of charity implores the engagement, through discourse, of otherness, while leaving the question of truth open to interpretation. This promotes freedom from 'The Letter,' without regressing to relativism, but also means Weak Thought must advance a constructive discourse. Vattimo argues that discourses such as fundamentalism illegitimately lay claim to the Truth and seek to occupy the 'chair' made vacant by Christ. The place of Truth is reserved for faith, which is described as a leap into the abyss of uncertainty, creating the potential for new modes of experiencing the world spiritually.

This paper will argue that while the necessity for charity is central to the doctrine of 'Weak Thought,' necessary political concessions fostered by a specifically Western school of thought make this plausible. Once this is evident, 'Weak Thought' can be seen as an effective tool for dialogue with certain, willing traditions, while effectively criticising fundamentalist doctrines committed to the 'Letter'.

Graham Wood

Graham.Wood@utas.edu.au

University of Tasmania

The Fall and the rise of consciousness

In this paper I offer a reinterpretation of the account of the Fall in Genesis. I take this text to refer to the evolution of self-consciousness in humanity. I begin by highlighting what I take to be the central message of the text, namely that Adam and Eve are able to 'walk with God' before eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that this possibility is precluded afterwards. I briefly discuss the traditional moral interpretation of this text and how it relates to the evolution of self-consciousness and then go on to develop the detail of this interpretation and explore its implications in the context of theism and pantheism.

John Wright

jnwright@westnet.com.au

Newcastle University

The "Felicitous Alignment" and the Place of Free Will in Nature

William James pointed out there is a "felicitous alignment" between what we find pleasant and what is good for us. Things that produce pleasant sensations also tend, on the whole, to be good for our survival. James saw this alignment as a powerful argument against epiphenomenalism: if our mental states had no causal powers it would seem to merely a fortunate fluke that this alignment should obtain.

But, explaining just why this alignment exists proves to be much harder than we might initially expect. A natural first place to look for such an explanation is the theory of evolution. But, it will be argued, straightforward evolutionary explanations leave the crucial questions unanswered. In the paper it is argued we can only explain the "felicitous alignment" if we postulate that a power of free choice exists in organisms, and that it is evolutionarily prior to the capacity to feel pleasure and pain. On such a view, the power of free choice must be very widespread in nature, and must also be a relatively primitive feature of organisms.

Robyn Wrigley-Carr

robyn@openfusion.com.au

Broken Bay Institute

Authentically human: von Hügel's spiritual direction of Gwendolen Greene

Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925) is best known as a religious philosopher from the late 19th and early 20th century. Less well known is von Hügel's work as a spiritual director, which has been suggested to underlie his entire religious philosophy.

This paper seeks to explore three perspectives on what it means to be authentically human, as found in the interaction between von Hügel and Gwendolen Greene. First, we explore the conception of authentic humanity found in von Hügel's spiritual direction itself. Second, we examine Greene's reflections on how von Hügel's life embodied his own teachings. Third, we explore how Greene's own life was shaped by the teaching she received from von Hügel.

Michael Young

frmichaelyoung@bigpond.com

Sydney College of Divinity.

Intentional Freedom, the Fundamental Construct of Self-Consciousness

According to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, "Consciousness is not a natural phenomenon". It is a task to be accomplished. It is a task that requires desire and effort. It is a task that belongs to an "inclined, aroused will" across the whole trajectory from deliberation to choice to action; in short, the act of willing traverses the span from intention to initiative. From intention to initiative, the agent reveals something of himself or herself throughout the deliberation process as well as in the action that completes this process. From intention to initiative, the will exercises its freedom to choose.

But the effort required in the task of building self-awareness is fraught with difficulties, not the least being the effort to make everyday choices in the light of ideals, however indeterminate, that drive us forward as the truth of the self unfolds over time. Yet, though the truth of the self is constantly unfolding, we are challenged to take responsibility for our actions; actions that make us not only capable people, that is, people having the capacity to act, but also ethical people in our relation to the world, to others and to ourselves since our actions bear witness to our personal sincerity and integrity. Hence, for Ricoeur, to arrive at self-consciousness means, "We have to dare" because "freedom is always a risk".