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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.

Reviewing the ISCAST year – 2011

A/Prof Alan Gijsbers President ISCAST

This year's COSAC grappled with how to live the Gospel as scientists in a contemporary society. (See also the introductory sketch in my latest CPOSAT paper *Neuroscience, Addiction and the Gospel* on the ISCAST website). Nancey Murphy's studies helped us to deal with the disenchantment towards the life of faith and now the post-modern disenchantment with science. Denis Alexander gave a very deep and clear exposition addressing the misuse of science to boost ideology. These and other papers presented by ISCASTians are available on the ISCAST website. You will now be able to see the papers you missed because of timetable clashes. They reflect a high level of thoughtful godliness within our fellowship.

Bishop John Harrower's devotional talks are on his website are worth a visit.

The conference struggled to break even. Given our vision to professionalise ISCAST and to make it a key player in the science-religion scene in Australia, this means we will have to fund our vision in other ways – recruiting more fellows and associates, relying on donations, applying for grants or even consultancies. Any other imaginative suggestions would be welcome.

We have a new board who face the following challenges:

- Delegating the next COSAC to the Adelaide group, who would like to look at the challenge of space exploration, life on other planets and the Search for Extra-terrestrial intelligence. Given the anti-Christian hype in the general media in reaction to the possibility of bacteria on Mars, it would be good to address these issues in thoughtful way. They are enthusiastic and the theme is growing on me. Let's work hard to make this COSAC the best ever!
- We need to find funds and recruit an Executive Officer. Our attempt to raise funds last year was unsuccessful but we are encouraged to try again.
- We need to develop a research program, and we have some people keen to help us pursue this. Our differentiating point is that we relate our research to the central message of the Christian faith.
- Supporting chapters around Australia, from our newest chapters in Bathurst-Orange and West Gippsland, to South Australia (who are getting going) and expressions of interest in Western Australia, to our established chapters in Sydney and Melbourne. We also hope something may happen in Queensland. We are amalgamating the oversight of funds of chapters nationally for auditing purposes but one of the main reasons for the board's existence is to strengthen and support the chapters and to foster local initiative.
- Supporting our communications working group. This year we want to spend about \$6,000 on developing a separate CPOSAT (Christian Perspectives On Science and Technology) website so that our publications will be more readily accessed on the Internet.

We hope the two chapters in Victoria will also be able to mount a thoughtful and mature response to the next Atheists convention once again in Melbourne.

Have a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year,

Alan Gijsbers

In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- Event News

www.iscast.org

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.



Is the world unfinished?

An interesting article in the latest issue of Theology, (Nov.c 2011, Vol 114 #6, pages 403-413_), "Is the world unfinished? On interactions between science and theology in the concepts of nature, time and the future" by Jürgen Moltmann (the Boyle Lecture for 2011). The lecture sets discussion of these issues in the context of long-term historical reflection in a helpful way including an illuminating discussion of the 'two books' model (the scriptures and nature). [More](#)



Science as Religion

Barney Zwartz examines the assumptions that form the foundation of the scientific enterprise in The Religious Write blog. Zwartz reviews the recent debate between the atheist physicist Alan Lightman and the atheist philosopher Daniel Dennet, noting their highly divergent views on the connections between science and faith. [More](#)

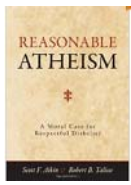
News items continued next page...

News Items



Royal Society journal archive made permanently free to access

"Treasures in the archive include Isaac Newton's first published scientific paper, geological work by a young Charles Darwin, and Benjamin Franklin's celebrated account of his electrical kite experiment." [More](#)



All due respect - "Reasonable Atheism" by Aikin and Talisse reviewed

A review of 'Reasonable Atheism' in The Philosopher's Magazine finds that the book is "a worthwhile read" for believers, atheists, and agnostics. [More](#)



Does scientific enquiry preclude belief in God?

ABC's Religion and Ethics posted an opinion piece by Neil Ormerod titled 'Does scientific enquiry preclude belief in God?' [More](#)



The psychopath in us all

On ABC radio, research fellow at The Faraday Institute Kevin Dutton discusses the personalities of psychopaths. [More](#)



God and science with the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Richard Dawkins and Lisa Randall

The cosmologist Professor Randall looks at the how the latest developments in physics have the potential to alter radically our view of the world around us, and our place within it. [More](#)



Questioning God: Faith and Atheism in Australia

Will Australia's future be godless? Should there be chaplains in public schools? Should faith inform politics? Should religious belief be reflected in Australian law?

Does scientific inquiry preclude belief in God? These are questions raised by the emergence of the 'new atheism' in Australia. They are serious questions not only for people of faith but for Australian society as a whole. [More](#)



Christianity, Paganism and the Environment

Mick Pope writes on the Ethos Environment Blog: "As someone who has suggested Christians become active in caring for 'the environment' or more theologically correct 'the creation', even if it means being involved with, following information from and copying those who do not share our faith, I have been labelled a pagan. Is this fair?" [More](#)



Picking your brains: what's going on inside your head?

The past 30 years have seen the most remarkable advances in the study of the brain. And the past ten have seen more advances in our understanding than all the other years combined. [More](#)



Australian scientist Brian Schmidt wins Nobel Physics Prize

For the first time since 1915, an Australian has taken home the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Astrophysicist Brian Schmidt last night became only the 12th Australian to win a Nobel prize, recognised for his groundbreaking research on supernovae and the expansion of the universe. [More](#)



Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? - Audio

Audio is now available from Prof. Nancey Murphy's presentation at the Rollie Busch Memorial Lecture delivered at 7.30pm, Wednesday 24th August 2011, at Trinity Theological College, Brisbane. [More](#)



Did Darwin Defeat God?

Sarah Coakley, Professor of Divinity, gives an honest appraisal of the key

problems that evolution proposes for theism, and develops some sophisticated responses, drawing on the Christian doctrines of Incarnation, Trinity and kenosis. [More](#)



Particle discovery challenges Einstein law

Physicists report that sub-atomic particles called neutrinos can travel faster than light, a finding that, if verified, would blast a hole in Einstein's theory of relativity. [More](#)



Aboriginal DNA dates Australian arrival

DNA sequencing of a 100-year-old lock of hair has established that Aboriginal Australians have a longer continuous association with the land than any other race of people. [More](#)



Military robotics and ethics: A world of killer apps

P. W. Singer's article in Nature regarding military robotics urges us "to wrestle with the implications of our technologies". [More](#)



Star Voyager: Exploring Space on Screen

ACMI presents the world premiere of Star Voyager: Exploring Space on Screen, a major exhibition charting the history and future of space exploration as experienced through the moving image. [More](#)



Alister McGrath videos online

The following is a compilation of online videos featuring Prof. Alister McGrath, courtesy of his official Facebook page: [More](#)



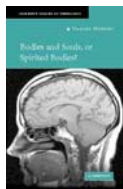
Where is everybody? Doing the maths on extra-terrestrial life

Jon Borwein and David H. Bailey provide a primer on the mystery of Fermi's Paradox, and discuss several proposed resolutions, in The Conversation. [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 Nancey Murphy's book 'Bodies and souls, or spirited bodies'

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 154

ISBN-10: 0521676762 ISBN-13: 978-0521676762

Reviewed by
John Pilbrow

Reproduced, with permission from *The Melbourne Anglican* June 2011, p. 25

Review Extract

In describing us as spirited bodies, requiring no additional element such as mind, soul or spirit, the author operates from what she calls a nonreductive physicalist position, a view that in no way denies that we are intelligent, moral or spiritual. Further she rejects any idea that our functioning can be reduced to just the biochemical processes within our bodies or, that our thoughts and actions are totally determined by the laws of neurobiology. This is Nancey Murphy's response to the question, 'Are humans immortal souls temporarily housed in physical bodies, or are we our bodies?'.

The author believes it necessary to critique traditional views held by Christians, such as dualism (a body and soul or a body and mind) or trichotomism (body, soul and spirit). She finds her students are split between dualism and trichotomism, and that most biologists and neuroscientists are physicalists, whereas Christian philosophers are divided between physicalism and dualism.



Calvin, scripture, and the natural order

Murray Hogg, October 2011

Author

Murray Hogg, Chair

ISCAST Victoria, Pastor Camberwell East Baptist Church

Abstract

By way of commemorating the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth, his exegesis of Scripture in light of his understanding of the Natural Order is considered. First, Calvin's intellectual context is briefly discussed with particular reference to Natural Philosophy (the forerunner of modern science) and Christian Humanism.

Taken together, these provide a broad framework for understanding how Calvin brought contemporary understandings of the Natural Order to bear upon his reading of scripture. It is noted, however, that the relative stability of Natural Philosophy and the harmonious relationship between it and theology gave rise to few, if any, problems for Biblical exegetes of the period. Second, Calvin's exegetical approach is considered with particular reference to the critically important principle of Accommodation followed by studies of two cases in which Calvin engages with understandings of Nature in his biblical exegesis: 2 Timothy 2:17 and Psalm 58:4. It is concluded that although there are valuable lessons to be learned from Calvin's exegetical approach, the evidence is too scant to state with confidence how Calvin might have responded to 21st century concerns.



Who am I?

Alan Gijsbers

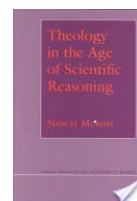
Author

Assoc Prof Alan Gijsbers, Head Addiction Medicine Royal Melbourne Hospital, Medical Director Substance Withdrawal Service The Melbourne Clinic Richmond & President ISCAST.

Abstract

Who am I personally? I am a physician in Addiction Medicine. I have the privilege and the challenge of dealing with people addicted to alcohol and or other drugs. If you like I am an applied neuroscientist. My laboratory is the bedside and the consulting room. My subjects are my patients. The scientific literature is my guide to providing the best service available to them.

Neuroscience is a vast and complicated field. Some neuroscientists work at the micro-level studying nerve conduction or neurotransmitters. Some neuroscientists may spend their lives studying one single transmitter that communicates between one nerve and the next. Neuro-radiologists study neural images via scans of all types –CAT, PET, SPECT, and MRI scans. Neurologists study strokes, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and the like. Neuropsychiatrists study and treat structural brain conditions like dementia, Huntington's chorea. Psychiatrists treat conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and personality disorders. Psychologists study aspects of psychological functions like perception, fear, cognition and the like.



Review of Nancey Murphy's book 'Theology in the age of scientific reasoning'

Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion,

Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1990, 215 pp.

ISBN 0801424003, 9780801424007

Reviewed by

Murray Hogg

Reproduced, with permission from *The Melbourne Anglican* June 2011, p. 25

Review Extract

Coming to terms with science has been a task which has captured the attention of theologians for generations. Often the concern has been to assess the scientific credentials of particular doctrines, like the virgin birth of Christ or the formation of living organisms. The bigger question, however, has to do with the very way we approach thinking about theology. What does it mean to practice theology scientifically?

Nancey Murphy has given this question very serious consideration, drawing on the work of renowned philosopher of science, Imre Lakatos (1922–1974), to suggest an approach to theology which takes account of recent advances in philosophy of science. It is certainly not light reading, but those willing to tackle some quite complex philosophical issues will find it most rewarding. It is perhaps the most sophisticated treatment of its kind and, despite being published some 21 years ago, retains enormous contemporary relevance.

Murphy begins with a historical overview of scientific practice and its implications for theology. Starting with Hume, she considers the work of Popper, Stout, Pannenberg and, of course, Lakatos, and in so doing provides as concise an overview of the history of post-Humean theology as one could hope to find. The point is basically to lay bare the problems besetting theological enquiry in the modern age.

**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)

In October a number of Victorian ISCASTians visited the Grampians to explore "God, human beings and the environment" in an appropriate setting. Margo Sietsma, an ISCAST Associate, showed us the wonders of the Grampians flora which were simply stunning. During this time she also spoke about the challenges of re-introducing animal species into areas where once they were abundant.

The issue is not simple as there are substantial costs and competing requirements (e.g. the needs of the helmeted "money"-eater vs that of the brush-tailed rock wallaby). How to decide? Where to start?

Richard Gijbers also spoke of the challenge posed by the different positions adopted by Christians regarding the environment. Very different conclusions are held equally fervently and often justified using similar appeals to Scripture (albeit different bits or sometimes different approaches to the same bits). For him, the call is to pursue the revelation that we have received but to be aware that brothers and sisters in Christ may understand things differently.

Our thanks to Margo and Christina for organising a magnificent weekend.



ISCAST
CHRISTIANS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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.

Other News

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 Twitter: [@ISCAST_Oz](https://twitter.com/ISCAST_Oz)

 Tune in to our [Podcast](#)

Keep an eye on
the website for
events in 2012
www.iscast.org

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