

The Faraday Papers (Faraday Papers 1-16 at this stage)

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Reviewed by Ian Hore-Lacy

This is a wonderful collection of papers, each four A4 pages, covering a range of topics relevant to ISCAST. Their diversity allows each author to write according to interest without any imposed editorial homogeneity, and in my view this enhances their appeal.

John Polkinghorne leads the way with an overview of 'The science and religion debate' and how it has been manifest as argument and conversation. While most of us have read plenty along this line, he manages to bring a fresh treatment. Paper 4 by him extends the natural theology part of this to an excellent exposition of the anthropic principle, in simple language. It highlights the quandary of scientists who recognize the importance of the specific conditions for carbon-based life — the fine-tuning — but have no inclination to look outside science for any explanation.

Roger Trigg gives a helpful philosophical outline of how science rests on major assumptions regarding the regularity and order of the physical world, rather than being autonomous. Denis Alexander then sets out four models for relating science and religion, and suggests why the conflict model persists so disastrously today. The familiar complementary model where each is addressing the same reality from different perspectives is most useful, but not the be-all and end-all.

Sir John Houghton answers the question, 'Why care for the environment?' in measured terms regarding sustainability and his own specialty of climate change. Another paper with apologetic aspects is John Bryant on 'Ethical issues in genetic modification'. He surveys the background and application of GM in both plants and animals, considering the ethical debates in relation to each. He concludes 'that there are strong theological motivations' for using it within ethically-defined limits.

A most helpful discourse on 'Reductionism: Help or hindrance in science and religion' by Michael Poole teases out the implications of methodological, epistemological and ontological reductionism, showing how the first is essential and the last bumps up against the limits to science. Alister McGrath's 'Has science killed God?' takes this discussion further with reference to Dawkins, and concludes that:

Dawkins' atheism seems to be tacked on to his science with intellectual Velcro, lacking the rigorous evidential basis that one might expect from an advocate of the scientific method.

A fascinating paper on 'The age of the Earth' by Bob White surveys the evidence and concludes hermeneutically. Rodney Holder asks: 'Is the universe designed?' and usefully complements Polkinghorne's anthropic

principle paper, with more attention to critiquing arguments that the universe is not designed.

Three papers focused on Genesis are outstanding. Ernest Lucas on 'Interpreting Genesis in the 21st century' covers a lot of old ground but expounds both the cultural context and the relevance today very well. Sam (RJ) Berry gives a lucid account of creation and evolution needing to be understood together 'to do justice to what we as scientists observe'. Graeme Finlay then looks at 'Human genomics and the Image of God', showing how we need to understand humans in relation to the genetic story which narrates our biological history, and the personal story concerning cultures, beliefs and behaviour. The genetic account is fascinating, but he doesn't venture into when and how humans were created in God's image.

Two historical papers, on Michael Faraday, and the 'Galileo Affair', by Colin Russell and Ernan McMullan respectively, probe the interaction of science and faith in a godly person and in a fraught ecclesiastical situation.

The last paper at this point refutes the claim that we are 'Nothing but a pack of neurons'. Stuart Judge expounds implications of neuroscience in three positions: strong reductionism, dualism, and dual-aspect monism, which he feels 'has many advantages'.

The papers are available as a set in hard copy, but postage would exceed their very modest £2 price tag. Alternatively <http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/Papers.php> has them as individual PDF files free, some in several languages.

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