

IRAS NEWSLETTER

Volume 58, Number 1

Fall 2009

The Mythic Reality of the Autonomous Individual: Chautauqua 2009

Summary by Eugene Troxell

Wow! Another fine week of interacting with probably the most pleasant group of intellectuals anywhere on the planet. This time it took place in Chautauqua, NY, not on Star Island, NH. Everyone has their own opinions about which is the better place to hold conferences. Each site has its own advantages and disadvantages. No one can argue with the advantage of daily showers, private baths, etc. On the other hand Chautauqua had a great deal more noise than I remember at Star Island. Certainly relatively smooth surfaces upon which to walk are a major advantage for people of the general age of IRAS members. That was enough of an advantage for Ian Barbour and his wife to attend this conference, and that may have been true for some other people too. On the other hand, Star Island has its own rustic charm, which is difficult to duplicate even in an historic venue like Chautauqua. I missed the pelicans, though the serving people at Chautauqua

were certainly polite and efficient. The food at Chautauqua was a bit too tasty and too abundant for weak willed people like myself. Star Island food is certainly more than adequate, but it did not tempt me quite so much. On the other hand the round tables at Chautauqua upon which we ate facilitated greater diversity of mealtime discussions.

For me this was the most “fun” conference I have attended. It was also among the most instructive. Michael served as an excellent pastor, day by day leading us through different features of the spiritual life, while supplying plenty to laugh about. He showed that god makes mistakes. After a very unconvincing argument showing that he is god, he very convincingly stated that he makes mistakes. The music was excellent both at morning Chapel and at other times. I missed the evening candlelight walks to the chapel, as we had no evening chapel at all at Chautauqua



IRAS Plenary Speakers - 2009

**Werner DeBondt
Ted Laurenson
Anne Foerst
Ken Gergen
Alicia Juarrero
Phil Cary
Anindita Balslev
John Teske
Lene Jensen
Steve Winter
Amy Banks**



Chapel service with Michael Cavanaugh.

But I thought there was actually a bit more active discussion during free times, possibly because the group was a quite a bit smaller than usual.

Perhaps I simply have not paid much attention to this at other conferences, but in this conference co-chairs Ted Laurenson and John Teske assembled an amazing diversity of the nationality of participants. Both the speakers and other active members of the conference had come from a large number of other nations. Participants that were either native to or were presently living and working in Belgium, Netherlands, England, Denmark, Sweden, India, Pakistan, Canada and Cuba, and even Australia, were present and actively participating. Oh yes, there were some from the United States as well.

It was a bit strange to have an IRAS conference with no talks by either Ursula Goodenough or Terry Deacon. However, Ursula's work behind the scenes became readily apparent. And our prestigious chaplain seemed convinced that Terry actually did make an appearance. He had merely transformed himself into an attractive woman and appeared under the identity of Alicia Juarero.

The conference title made it sound like speakers would be giving reasons for regarding autonomy as a myth. However, that was not the major direction of the conference. Most of the speakers agreed that humans do have a small degree of autonomy or free will. What was regarded as mythical was the American idea of the "free, independent, autonomous" individual—the individual that acts completely on the basis of his or her (usually his) creative ideas to bring about his own happiness, a la Ayn Rand. In other words, the hero of laissez faire capitalism.

The mythic feature lies in the amount of autonomy and independence with which the individual is endowed by the American idea of the individual. Actually every individual is subjected to thousands of social and genetic influences, almost all of which remain in the individual's subconscious as they continue to affect the individual's choices and actions throughout his life. And virtually every ability of every individual arises through an enor-

mous social network of other people. The entire social system within which the individual develops and lives shapes virtually every feature, particularly all the non-physical features, of all the people in the social system. The individual is not a product of its own individual thinking. Its ability to think—what it thinks of as thinking—is a function of its interrelationships with other people, and through them, with thousands of years of accumulated knowledge supplied by previous generations of humans. The features of the individual are created externally, not internally.

The regular conference talks began Saturday evening, as Ted Laurenson, one of the conference coordinators, made some introductory remarks about the conference topic and then gave his own view on the Myth of the Autonomous Individual. Humans are constantly developing new capabilities, in large part from interacting with other members of their society and their social structure. Consequently they retain a degree of autonomy in spite of the fact that they are subject to thousands of outside influences, as well as to the possibility of coercive constraint. However feeble our autonomy may be, however short of the popular idea of the efficacious individual we may be, that small amount of autonomy remains essential to the rule of law and to our political structure.

Sunday morning Phil Cary gave his perspective on traditional religious ideas of the individual as well as our modern understanding. Phil turned out to be a valuable person to have around both as a conference presenter and for spirited contributions to other features of the conference. His booming voice frequently reminded the noisy crowd that a talk or a discussion was about to begin. He also presented penetrating insights into the views of other presenters. His talk discussed the neo-Platonic view of the self held by St. Augustine. Augustine viewed the self as a separate soul, inside the body, living in its own private inner world. This view of the self has persisted up through fairly modern times. Lately it is being replaced among Christian theologians by a more relational view with the relationships modeled on the holy trinity. The relational view is more subject to influence from the social interrelationships within which it is shaped while remaining quite substantially real.



Phil Cary lecturing to IRAS.

Sunday Evening we enjoyed an interesting talk by Anindita Balslev. She pointed out that both the Indian and Western philosophic views of the self have varied considerably. What has not varied, however, is the certainty that one has an I-consciousness. Moreover, this I-consciousness is quite real, in spite of being very poorly understood. “That which is closest to us is farthest from our understanding,” in spite of the fact that within Hinduism “knowledge of the self” is regarded as the highest form of consciousness. Though scientists reject dualism, Dr. Balslev thinks it has a place in an intelligent discussion of the nature of I-consciousness or the self. The “I” that is referenced by the speaker necessarily is quite different from the hearer’s idea of the speaker.

Monday morning featured a very noisy talk by Lene Jensen. The superabundance of noise was due to the fact that we were experimenting with an outside amphitheater. It was constantly surrounded by noisy trucks and other mechanical devices. To make matters worse it did not have an effective sound system. However Dr. Jensen held her ground with her pleasantly high feminine voice. She talked about research concerning a cultural-developmental approach to ethical values and reasoning, which was offered as a better approach than the “one size fits all” or the completely culture specific approaches to this subject. She divided the ethics into ethics of autonomy, ethics of community, and ethics of divinity, showing charts depicting changes in ethical thinking along these lines at different times in an average individual’s life.

Monday evening was the most interesting talk of the entire conference for me, barely beating out my second favorite—John Teske’s talk. It was by Alicia Juarrero and it was so interesting for me because it fit perfectly into the social model I have been using to talk about the evolutionary development of duty or gynecological or absolute ethical rules. She made use of complexity theory to demonstrate a way in which individual autonomy

emerges out of the rigid influences the society exerts upon the individual.

She began by briefly talking about the difference between a wink and a blink. Aside from social differences that may include legal and ethical differences, the major difference is intention. A wink is an intentional action. A blink is not usually intentional and if it is intentional it does not have the type of intention as a wink. A wink may be regarded as action caused by an internal principle. Caused by?? Modern science has reduced Aristotle’s four causes to only one. The only type of cause now counted as a cause is efficient, or “billiard-ball” causality. But, then, how can an intention be the efficient cause of anything? For the same reasons meaning cannot be a cause, though we commonly regard it as the reason for action. For similar reasons there can be no parts-to-whole causality, nor whole-to-parts. Nothing can cause itself.

Complexity theory offers a way out of this conundrum. Phase change as a result of increasing energy can bring order out of chaos—a type of emergence. The order then produces the constraints that produce new “internal” wholes. The parts interact to produce new wholes—a type of self-causality. Since the wholes have new types of behaviors, not just that of the old parts, we can see this, in conscious entities, as a type of autonomy. An important part of the same types of interactions among parts of a society is that illustrated by constitutive rules. The rules of behavior produce socially constructed entities with completely different functions than those supplied by the individual parts. Language is an excellent example of an extremely effective tool produced by adherence to constitutive rules. Part of the problem with understanding this type of dynamic function is produced by our tendency to reify what we are thinking about. Consciousness, autonomy, intention, language, meaning, semantic components, all become entities in our minds, and that prevents us from a more dynamic understanding of the interactions producing these “features” of our reality.

At the conference the talks by Amy Banks and Anne Foerst were interchanged, relative to their places in the Orange book. Anne Foerst spoke Tuesday morning and Amy Bank spoke Tuesday evening. Anne began her talk by pointing out that although the words “human” and “person” are frequently used interchangeably, they actually have quite different meanings. Non-human animals and even robots may be considered as persons, and some humans may be denied personhood. It was interesting that on Friday, at the panelists discussion, it was pointed out that the notion of god-given natural rights was originally constructed as a means of justifying slavery. The slaves were not regarded as fully human, and consequently as without the types of natural rights god had granted to the fully human slave owners.

Dr. Foerst also pointed out that the term “person” is derived from the Latin term “persona” which means mask. Three persons in one god can be regarded as the three “masks” of god. Various differences between humans and other animals were explained. Humans, for example, know that they will die. There is no good reason to believe other animals know this. Humans are also liable to sin, both in the sense of departing from god’s will, and in the sense of being aware they have sinned along with the concomi-



Angels Marion Griswold and Katherine Houk in a porch jam session.

tant sense of shame. Humans are created co-creators. One of the types of things we would like to create are human-like robots. Since Dr. Foerst had worked as a research scientist at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, she had had a good deal of interaction with sophisticated robots. She pointed out that robots are not the same as Artificial Intelligence, as simulated by computers. Robots usually have ways of "sensing" the world around them. She believes we can learn a good deal about personhood, and consequently autonomy, through our attempts to develop human-like robots. We already have learned a lot. But we still have a long way to go.

Amy Banks focused upon more practical features of relationships. Good relationships generally make people much more healthy, than people without much relationship. She listed five aspects of healthy people enhanced by good relationships. They tend to have more zest for life, better abilities to act, more accurate images of their selves, more self worth, and each person feels more related to other people. Better abilities to act out of motives of sympathy and empathy are also present in people living in full relationships. Love is regarded as much more important for relationship oriented people, as is "going with the flow" of persons and events. Such relationships are extremely important for infants. The caregiver's job should be to keep the child in an "optimal state of arousal." Since being alone and feeling lonely can be destructive to the individual an idea of a personal god can be very helpful for making one feel less alone. Dr. Banks ended with the statement that we are badly in need of a cultural revolution that places much less emphasis on the notion of individuality.

Wednesday morning featured John Teske, one of the conference organizers. John offered example after example of ways in which what we have thought of as internal to the individual is actually acquired from the individuals' relationship with features of the social system, including, of course, with other individuals. The old internal way of thinking of ourselves has major grounding in traditional Christian theology, in part due to regarding the "soul" as a separate entity internal to the body, but capable of existing without the body. Mind has also been regarded as an independent entity existing in the head of the individual. (Reification has been with us for as long as language has had nouns.) It is correct to say an individual has a mind. But the mind is not just internal. It primarily is the mind of the society, in which the individual participates. Mental events are hybrids of physical events and social events.

John gave an interesting example of memory as external by means of a story about consulting with a very competent attorney. After the consultation John congratulated the attorney on being so knowledgeable about different features of the law. The attorney replied that he actually did not know much more law than John did. The difference was that he knew where to find what he needed to know in books and other publicly available information. John stressed the importance of relationships in our lives,

intimate as well as social. He talked about different levels of empathy, including: 1) involuntary coupling 2) Imagination 3) mutual understanding of self and other 4) and putting yourself in the other person's place, thus perceiving the individual as worthy of respect. While individual moral responsibility is very important, we must realize that we are integral parts of an interdependent web of life as well as an interdependent social system.

Ken Gergen's first talk was one of the strangest I have heard. He began by pointing out that firm beliefs can be quite dangerous. Certainty is a problem. He then went on to say that "reality" makes no demands upon what we say about it. As he illustrated what he meant by that statement he seemed to me to be saying that we can say anything we want about reality with none of it actually being part of the reality or mattering to anything. Even predicting what will happen is of no consequence. However, on Friday, at the speaker's discussion, he seemed to be a completely different person, talking about many things that matter considerably to human beings. I came away from that discussion with the idea that I could not have understood him very well at his main talk. However, it was clear at the main talk that many other people in the audience were also unsure what he was saying. Anyway it was all an interesting experience and it was clear that his idea of the individual was quite in accord with the relationist view expressed by John Teske and other speakers. I expect to acquire a better idea of the meaning of Wednesday's talk as different people, including primarily John, talk about it.

Thursday morning had Steven Winter presenting dozens of ways in which our social systems expect us to act as fully autonomous individuals in spite of the fact that we now know we are socially constructed individuals. In science we talk about individuals making major discoveries. It would be more correct to speak of the totality of scientists, as well as other individuals in the social system, making the discovery. In economics we rely upon the autonomous individual making intelligent decisions—or decisions that are at least understood by the individual making them. But the socially constructed individuals making those decisions are simply following the crowd. Our current idea of democracy abandons equality among participants precisely by expecting all to be completely autonomous individuals. We live a life of commodification, in which religious beliefs, relationships and political ideas are regarded as commodities like the groceries we buy in stores.

The conclusion of all this new understanding is that we need to rethink our democracy, as well as our business and religious practices, in accord with our new understanding of the socially constructed individual. We also need to do away with thinking in terms of mind/body dualities. Going from thinking of ourselves as static entities to dynamic processes would be progress. Sexual autonomy also needs to be respected. Sexual autonomy provides an important domain for learning self governance.

Thursday Evening had Werner De Bondt discussing the indi-



The IRAS Choir with Cindy Lind Hanson, Director and accompanist, rehearsing in the Hall of Philosophy.

vidual and the economy from a similar point of view as that expressed by Steven Winter. Dr. De Bondt had plenty to say about how our defective idea of the autonomous individual is built into our current economic system and was, in large part, responsible for the recent market breakdown. Economic *theory*, not data or evidence, produces our apparent understanding of economics. The theory depends upon homo economicus, the rational, self interested, autonomous individual. One consequence of this idea is the belief that the economic system as well as the individuals running it can be responsibly self-governing. The state needs just to stay out of the way. As we begin to understand the ways in which our apparent autonomy, as well as our understanding are shaped by the theory, we can more clearly perceive the reasons why and the ways in which the theory needs to be seriously reconstructed. The predictions made on the basis of the idea of the individual as a rational, autonomous individual are simply not borne out in experience. Plenty of examples were given illustrating the problems of acting on the basis of an economic theory we now can see as being seriously inadequate, while we continue to ignore evidence that the theory is not working properly. The idea of self-regulation must be one of the first parts of the theory to be discarded.

The Panelists' Discussion on Friday saw great agreement on

the ways in which the traditional American idea of the autonomous, rational, individual contains numerous serious errors. It was further proposed that one of the mistakes we make is in terms of thinking of autonomy in an all or nothing, either/or, basis. Autonomy is better regarded as a continuum. Part of the problem arises out of our ways of thinking of abstract terms. Of course the conference does not deny the individual exists. What is denied is the idea of a self constructed and self sufficient individual. The individual is actually socially constructed, with the construction process remaining subconscious to the individual as it continues to influence the individual's decisions and actions. Nevertheless we are all formed out of these social interactions into unique individuals. We do not need to think alike in order to love each other. Truth, religious, scientific or otherwise is good. Certainty is the problem.

Various acts in the Friday evening variety show were excellent summaries of important parts of the conference. A skit with the individuals trying to find themselves clearly brought out one of the main features of the conference. We were graciously reminded again and again of the wonderful musical talent possessed by various conference participants—especially that of the talented choir director Cindy Lind Hanson. It was a very suitable conclusion to a wonderful conference.

President's Letter

My IRAS friends many and best:

I have details to report about the IRAS Council's decisions since our last newsletter concerning our conferences and their locations, but it's important to start with the bottom line: our 2010 conference on The Energy Transition: Religious and Cultural Perspectives, chaired by Norm Laurendeau and Larry Rasmussen, will be held on Star Island in our traditional week bridging July and August. That will be our last conference on Star in the foreseeable future, and we will return to the Chautauqua Institution in June 2011, probably in the fourth week of that month. Thereafter we will probably at least alternate between Chautauqua in June and another location later in the summer, but it may make sense to make Chautauqua our new home altogether.

Here's the background: When we informed Star in 2008 that we were planning to hold our 2009 conference at Chautauqua in June, we also told Star that we would like to return there in 2010 and that we would be interested in exploring the possibility of alternating summers between Star in our traditional time slot and Chautauqua, or perhaps returning to Star permanently (again in our traditional time slot) if we found this year that Chautauqua did not work well as an IRAS conference locale (which, however, we did not expect). Star responded after some consideration that they were not interested in trying to find someone to alternate with us, and we believed we did not have the resources to try to find another organization that would fit that ticket. While Star accepted our offer to return in 2010, the Star board of directors also found themselves under pressure from late-summer family conferences to move up their time slots (as a result of the beginning of school years having been moved up in some states to prior to Labor Day).

Star ultimately offered us their first conference season time slot (the third week in June) for 2011 and subsequent years (without the possibility of alternating with another locale) and told us they needed an answer by mid-April. The IRAS Council considered Star's offer and responded that it did not work for us for

three reasons: (1) a mid-June time slot would mean that a number of Northeastern state families with children could not come, either as attendees or to accompany invited speakers, (2) several of our members who have attended Star conferences in mid-June felt that the Atlantic Ocean weather could not be relied upon in that time slot and (3) Star's deadline for our answer would not have allowed us to assess the experience of holding a conference at Chautauqua before deciding to forego that possibility in the future.

As a result, we regretfully rejected Star's offer for years after 2010. After a successful conference at Chautauqua in the fourth week in June – I trust you have read or will read Gene Troxell's full and insightful conference write-up in this newsletter – at which the location and the services both received glowing reviews, the Council instructed me to approach Chautauqua to make arrangements for the 2011 conference and to appoint a new venue committee to consider our locales thereafter. Following up, I have spoken with Chautauqua representatives both about coming back in fourth week in June in 2011 (the 18th to the 25th) and about the possibility that we might hold our conference there during the following week, which is the first (and typically least attended) in their own extremely busy season of cultural and intellectual offerings. We are penciled in for the first of those weeks, but the second would have the advantage of more completely lying beyond the end of Northeastern school years and not conflicting with the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly. However, we are not sure it would make sense to hold an IRAS conference in the midst of the Chautauqua Institution season's hubbub and rather terrific distractions. Our sense is that, even if we think our conference could be fitted in successfully during the Chautauqua season, a time slot later than the first week of their season would not work because of conflicts in the use of facilities and greater expense.

I have recruited several members of the new venue committee, which will consider possible later-summer locations in alternate years and the possible desirability of simply staying at Chautauqua, and expect to have the committee fully formed within the next few weeks. I expect they will explore the possibility of using various college campuses and would welcome suggestions of other conference facilities worth looking into.

Before turning from this subject, I want to reemphasize the care and consideration that has gone into these decisions. In addition to the amazing level of work devoted by our first venue committee (under Michael Cavanaugh's energetic and thorough direction), the members of the Council have spent many hours discussing our courses of action. Several of us attended multiple meetings of the Star Council of Conferences and the Star Island Corporation to discuss IRAS's and Star's interests and whether they could be reconciled. We identify deeply with the attachment of many of our members to Star's rugged beauty and its wonderful traditions, and these decisions have been tearfully difficult. We have taken them in what we believe to be the best interests of IRAS, and hope and expect to continue to see all of



Cowpokes Jay Einhorn and Maynard Moore in the Variety Show.



Ted Laurensen presenting the service award to Marion Griswold.

our members at our conferences, wherever they are held.

While we are on the subject of conferences, I note that in addition to serving as co-chair of next year's summer conference, Norm Laurendeau has continued to pull the laboring oar in working with the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) on the establishment of a series of two-day mid-winter conferences to be held in Berkeley, possibly beginning as early as 2011. (Norm reported on this in our last newsletter.) We and CTNS have now applied to the John Templeton Foundation for a grant to support these conferences, and we hope to hear by early next year whether the application will be approved. Even if approval is not at first forthcoming, however, we expect to continue to pursue this initiative. I believe Norm's previous efforts in this connection helped inspire an unsolicited contribution by the John Templeton Foundation to IRAS's general fund, a welcome addition in these chancy and dark economic times.

Turning to IRAS leadership matters, I am delighted to welcome Jane Penfield as our new Vice President for Development, a job for which, with a background in nonprofit fundraising, she is spectacularly qualified. In accordance with the IRAS bylaws I have appointed Barry Boggs to take her place as one of the non-officer members of the Council (until the next annual meeting, where new non-officer members are elected). Wim Drees, the new Zygon editor and an ex officio member of the IRAS Council in that capacity, has resigned as both Vice President for Interdisciplinary Affairs and an elected non-officer member of the Council. In the former position he has been replaced by Ursula

Goodenough (most recently the Vice President for Development and, of course, both a former president and co-chair of a number of conferences in the last two decades). To replace Wim as an elected non-officer member of the Council (again until the next annual meeting) I have appointed Chip Ordman. Michael Cavanaugh has resigned as Secretary and taken up vigorous evangelizing as membership chair; to replace him as Secretary, the Council appointed Lyman Page. Lyman, who was also an elected non-officer member of the Council, and as Secretary is an ex officio member, has resigned the former position, but I can't yet tell you who I will appoint as his replacement.

As always, I urge you to contact me with your thoughts and am eager to recruit you to become involved with IRAS and its activities. As an all-volunteer organization, you are our life blood.

Ted Laurensen
 elarensen@mwe.com
 September 7, 2009



Susan Barreto and Ian Barbour combining waters from Star Island and Chautauqua.

Institute on Religion in an Age of Science

Fifty-sixth Annual Conference

Star Island, New Hampshire

July 24 – 31, 2010

The Energy Transition: Religious and Cultural Perspectives

Conference Co-Chair: Norm Laurendeau, Purdue University

Conference Co-Chair: Larry Rasmussen, Union Theological Seminary

Energy and climate change are typically discussed in terms of their associated science, technology, economics and politics. However, relatively little attention has been given to fundamental religious and ethical questions surrounding the upcoming transition to renewable energy.

Culturally, we are entering a period of monumental transition as we encounter the inevitable shift from fossil to renewable fuels. We are depleting fossil fuels while piling up nuclear wastes, yet solar and hydrogen power remain expensive or not significantly in place. As for any technological transition of this magnitude, ultimate success will require good ethics and religion as well as good science and technology. Unfortunately, religious pronouncements to date have been largely dismissed owing to their feeble consideration of accompanying scientific and technological realities. Nevertheless, religious perspectives have the advantage of highlighting ultimate values, regardless of economic and political pressures. The time has thus come to bring together scientists, engineers, ethicists and theologians to help effect a sustainable energy future.

The conference will engage scientific, technological, economic and political issues associated with energy conservation and renewable energies in the context of global warming, sustainability and human purpose. The emphasis will be on (1) ethical and religious perspectives that can be used to guide future energy choices and (2) energy choices which, in turn, might challenge ethical and religious perspectives. Queries will include the following:

How will human values be challenged by the coming energy transition?

What are the ethical implications of heightened competition for energy resources?

How might religious perspectives help foster renewable energy for transportation or electrical power?

What strategies can be used to provide affordable and sustainable energy for low-income citizens?

Can cultural values, as espoused by religious communities of simplicity, help humanize energy markets?

What role should religion play in reducing consumption and building sustainable global communities?

How are religious communities dealing with their energy infrastructure, mapping scenarios for alternative energy policies, and engaging realistically with those political processes needed to plan our energy future?

How might theological and religious understandings of energy contribute to a viable energy future?

How can religious institutions become better prepared to deal with human suffering on a global scale should we not plan well for a peaceful energy transition?

A professionally designed and led program will be available for children and youth ages 3-17. A refereed poster session will be held for young scholars. Clergy and seminarians will meet regularly during the conference to shape conference materials for use in their ministries. CEUs upon request.

A list of confirmed speakers and more information on IRAS can be found at www.iras.org. Information on Star Island is available at www.starisland.org. Information on conference fees, room and board, and registration is at www.iras.org/Conference.html or contact Bonnie Falla, IRAS registrar, 810½ N. Ninth St., Allentown, PA 18102; e-mail bfalla@enter.net.

Looking into Joan Goodwin's History Project: Star Island, the Birth of IRAS, and Off-Island Conferences

The last-minute forced cancellation of the 2007 IRAS conference on Star Island led the Council to consider different venues, should needs arise. It's an emotional subject. For many, Star Island and IRAS beat as one heart. IRAS has been entwined with Star since its prenatal days. The history of the formation of IRAS, assembled by Joan Goodwin and extracted here, shows the electric synergy between the conferees of The Coming Great Church conferences on Star Island and the scientists that joined them to form the new entity.

Fertilization of the IRAS ovum began in 1952, when Dana McLean Greeley invited his friend and parishioner, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, then Executive Officer of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (the "Academy"), to join him at The Coming Great Church conference on Star that year. These were globally-oriented, ecumenical conferences conceived by Rev. Lyman V. Rutledge and begun on Star Island in 1950. Participants were becoming increasingly aware of the relevance of science to religion and of the absence of scientists at their meetings.

Possibly catalyzed by the atomic bomb and other startling developments in molecular biology, members of the Academy had been increasingly interested in questions of morality in science. Burhoe responded shortly after coming to the Academy by forming in 1948 a Committee on Science and Values, with George Wald as Chair. After meeting Burhoe, Greeley wrote to the Committee in 1952. The result was an agreement to send Academy speakers to the 1954 Coming Great Church conference. In March, 1954 the organizers of the conference wrote Coming Great Church conferees to be prepared for a "different" kind of conference with major involvement by scientists. The subject and title would be "Religion in an Age of Science"! By the end of 1954 IRAS had been born (and named), the Coming Great Church conferences were to be merged into it, and IRAS's first Star Island conference, "What is Man that Thou Art Mindful of Him?" had been scheduled for July 30-August 6, 1955.

The organizing Steering Committee stated in November, 1954 that because of the importance of the subjects considered by the 1954 conference, "a permanent organization should be

formed to hold seminars during the winter at various places as well as the summer conference on Star Island." The formal IRAS Statement of Purpose included this idea, and IRAS, propelled by a core of activists (described in 1987 by Philip Hefner as "The Few .. " and " ... really terribly few .. ") showed itself capable of sustaining conferences off-Island.

Initially, since most of the organizers came from near Boston, meetings were held in that area rather frequently - bimonthly at first - mostly to do business, but philosophical issues were never far from the table. Then, quoting from Goodwin's history, " .. on April 27, 1957, the 'first open meeting on the mainland of the Star Island conference' convened at Boston University with the theme of 'Religion, Science, and the Current Crisis.' " Speakers included Edwin Booth, Paul Tillich, and Edwin Kemble, followed by a panel discussion led by George Wald (in Dana Greeley's absence) and composed of the three speakers, Phillip Rieff, and Philipp Frank.

From that point on sponsored or co-sponsored off-Island conferences occurred in most years of the next thirty, the end of Goodwin's review. These included many with the affiliated American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) under the leadership of Sol Katz and others, and the American Academy of Religion (AAR) usually led by Karl Peters; several at colleges, universities, seminaries, organizations with foci compatible with IRAS's; and some independently organized symposia. Sites included Europe and Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States from sea to sea. These conferences were uniformly well received and helped to solidify the reputation of IRAS established by the Star Island sessions.

In view of the current exploration of Chautauqua as a possible venue it's of some interest that one of the earliest off-island conferences sponsored by IRAS was at Chautauqua July 22-26, 1957. It consisted of a series of lectures by Edwin Booth and Harlow Shapley and was very well received. It has been described in some detail in the Spring 2008 Newsletter.

Lyman A Page

Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science

Zygon; Journal on Religion and Science, the foremost peer reviewed journal on the issues that concern us, is co-owned by IRAS and the publisher Wiley Blackwell;. Over 700 libraries subscribe directly; over 2200 academic libraries have Zygon in a consortium arrangement with Wiley Blackwell; over 600 in the developing world receive the journal at a very reduced rate or free of charge, while over 3000 libraries provide access to content older than a year via EBSCO. Our reach is global: about 1/3 in North America, 1/3 in Europe, and 1/3 in the rest of the World. The editorship has recently been transferred from Philip Hefner (20 years service as editor-in-chief) and Karl Peters (10 years ser-

vice as the editor, and 20 more years as editor for development) to me. To mark Phil's many years of service, a symposium was held in Chicago, early May 2009; papers on Zygon's role in the future of religion and science will be published in Zygon in 2010. The Philip Hefner Fund to support the journal was established to honour his very substantial service. There is 70,000 dollars offered in matching funds available for donations received in a five year period. Hence we hope to have at least 70,000 dollars in donations, so as to draw on the matching funds offered. The transition of editorship is gradual. Various articles accepted by Phil are still to be published. Every issue next year will have a contri-

bution by Philip Hefner! The office will remain in Chicago, though I will be based in the Netherlands.

The website www.zygonjournal.org has been renewed. It has information on the next issue, information for prospective authors, information on the Patron's fund and the Hefner fund, and much more. The website will develop further, as we add titles, abstracts, key words, and author information of all previous issues. We have begun with the issues of 2009 and 2008, and will expand the available information by adding information from previous years, until we get to issue 1 (1) of March 1966. The improved website should make it easier to find our articles when people search on the internet, as search engines come to index also these pages on our site. The full papers are available via the website of Wiley Blackwell, www3.interscience.wiley.com.

As it is important that articles are not only published but also read and cited, it is most welcome if you pay attention to the articles in *Zygon*, read them, bring them to the attention of interested friends and colleagues, and cite them. For your friends, and for everyone else interested, in any current year, the first issue (March) is freely accessible on the Wiley-Blackwell site during the whole year.

IRAS members receive *Zygon* and are entitled to electronic access to back issues. Current members should have received by e-mail last January their information with a personal registration key; the same information has been mailed again by Wiley Blackwell late June. If Wiley Blackwell did not mail you, or if the mail did not reach you, you can write the membership coordinator of IRAS, who might approach again Wiley-Blackwell to arrange for this benefit of membership. The IRAS Membership secretary is Michael Cavanaugh, MichaelCav@aol.com or mem-

[bership@iras.org](mailto:membership@iras.org).

In September 2009 we will have a whole section on "The Extended Mind", the notion that 'mind' is not limited to the brain, but includes a substantial part of our environment - for instance one's spouse as an external memory device. Some of the authors relate the consideration of such an understanding of the human mind to Buddhism and other traditions. The September issue will also have two papers on Bonobos and other social apes, humans included. Four articles address a classic theme, divine action and divine transcendence. And it all opens with an article on the evolution of moral norms. Genuine material for IRAS!

In future issues I expect a group of articles on semiotics, science and religion (a project of Christopher Southgate, Andrew Robinson and others), a symposium on the Buddhist Brain, clusters of articles on work by Antje Jackelén (Time and Eternity), Robert J. Russell (From Alpha to Omega), Donald Lopez (Buddhism and Science), and on John Haught, as well as many other articles.

I wish you all many good hours of reading with past and future issues - and if you are not yet a member of IRAS, this might be one more good reason to become one; contact Michael Cavanaugh, the new chairperson of our membership committee.

Yours,

Willem B. Drees

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ESSSAT and the next European Conference: "Is Religion Natural?"

The European Society for the Study of Science And Theology is in many ways similar to IRAS: a diverse group of people who want to take science serious, both in results and methods, and are in multiple ways interested in religion in our time. The current president of ESSSAT is Antje Jackelén, elected bishop of Lund, Sweden, and until recently director of the *Zygon* Center for Religion and Science in Chicago. Reflecting on religion in an age of science requires not only engagement with 'the scientific worldview' as a competitor to religious views, but also with scientific insights about religion. That will be the focus of the next European conference, on the theme "Is Religion Natural?" Speakers include Justin Barrett (cognitive science, USA/UK), Ilkka Pyysiäinen (Comparative Religion, Finland), Mona Siddiqui (Islamic studies, UK), and Christoph Schwöbel (Systematic Theology, Germany). There will be room for many short papers,

to be presented and discussed in parallel sessions. The conference starts April 7, 2010, at the end of the day, and ends on April 11, 2010, in the early morning. This year, the conference will be held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in collaboration with the university and with the British Science and Religion Forum. Deadline for the submission of abstracts for short papers is November 1st 2009; deadline for early registration is November 15. There also will be two prizes; nominations for the ESSSAT Research prize has deadline November 1; deadline for the ESSSAT Student prize is January 15, 2010. For more information and updates, see the website www.ESSSAT.org

Willem B. Drees

Immediate Past President of ESSSAT

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It is with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the following persons and organization for their gifts over the past

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The IRAS Newsletter is generally published in April and October by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, Inc. Jack Dennis, Editor, Belmont, Massachusetts, dennis@csail.mit.edu. editor. Photos in this issue were contributed by Roger Brown, Larry Davis and Daniel Johnson. Copyright 2009 by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, Inc. All rights reserved. ISSN 1048-9525. Information on IRAS can be found at www.iras.org. The Chautauqua Web site is at www.ciweb.org. Star Island is described at www.starisland.org. Information on conference fees, room and board, and registration can be found at www.iras.org/conference.html.