

THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Freedom
 Convener: Chelsea King, Sacred Heart University
 Moderator: Kevin Vaughan, The College of St. Scholastica
 Presenters: Charles Gillespie, Sacred Heart University
 Ligita Ryliškytė, S.J.E., Boston College
 Benjamin Hohman, Providence College

This session was comprised of three papers, each approximately twenty-five minutes in length, followed by a question and answer session that filled the remainder of the allotted time.

In his paper, “Freedom and Observation: Theodramatics Meets Quantum Theory,” Charles Gillespie invited a fascinating conversation between Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s theodramatics and relational quantum mechanics. One of the main points in Gillespie’s paper centered on the idea of “observation.” As Gillespie emphasized, physicist Carlo Rovelli proposes “relational quantum mechanics” (RQM) to include the observer as part of the relations observed. In RQM, there is “no external standpoint” from which to predict the freedom of phenomena in a quantum system. This was precisely where Gillespie brought in Balthasar as a dialogue partner. As he indicated, the phrase “no external standpoint,” belongs to Balthasar’s theodramatic conception of salvation history and the confrontation between God’s infinite freedom and the finite freedom of God’s creatures. Gillespie concluded that theodramatics can come together with RQM as a way to illuminate theological observations of divine and human freedom not as binary choice but as an expression of spontaneous life in relation.

In her paper, “The ‘Cosmic Freedom’ and Emergent Probability,” Ligita Ryliškytė proposed an analogical account of freedom by bringing together the work of contemporary voices, such as Sarah Coakley and Martin Nowak, as well as the work of Bernard Lonergan. Ryliškytė focused especially on Lonergan’s “Law of the Cross” with his theory of the world’s coming-to-be, conceived as generalized emergent probability. One of the main arguments in Ryliškytė’s paper was that the willingness to forego personal advantage out of love is the pinnacle of human freedom, in which the “cosmic” freedom of the upwardly but indeterminately directed world order becomes conscious of itself.

In his paper, “Has John Haught Freed Freedom Enough?,” Benjamin Hohman offered some biting critiques of theologian John Haught, especially in Haught’s work *God After Einstein* (2023). Hohman addressed Haught’s post-Einsteinian reading of the categories of “time” and “human freedom” in relation to the cosmic scope of “Big History.” He next assessed how Haught’s contribution related to (1) alternative scientific accounts of these topics rooted in theories of emergence and (2) the influential understanding of the category of human freedom inherited from Thomas Aquinas as read through the interpretations of Bernard Lonergan.

The discussion that followed prompted the presenters to move beyond their points considerably. First, Richard Miller asked Hohman how certain scientific accounts of evolution are understood by the scientists themselves—in particular, how many scientists seem to tend to favor Stephen Jay Gould over Simon Conway Morris. Miller

then asked whether Lonergan had an imaginative or affective style of writing, much like Haught's. Hohman responded to the first question by stressing the importance of allowing scientists to be scientists and advised that theologians should not claim to know more about science than the scientists. Regarding Lonergan's writing style, Hohman engaged in a discussion with Ryliškytė, highlighting the presence of metaphor and poetic language in Lonergan's work, albeit less so than in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's writings. The conversation then became focused on original sin—which prompted a very long and rich discussion on the differences between individual sin and social sin. All presenters were able to chime in about their various understandings of how sin fits in with their conception of freedom.

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