

THE QUESTIONS OF ORIGINS CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

16 • 6 • 2023 (Fri)

09:00 - 17:30

Keynote 1
Finding Design in Physics
(09:15-10:45)

17 • 6 • 2023 (Sat)

09:00 - 13:00

Keynote 2
How God can use Randomness
(09:00-10:30)

Venue

SCT 503 (LT 3), Cha Chi-ming Science Tower,
Ho Sin Hang Campus,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Plenary speaker

Prof. Luke Barnes
PhD Astronomy, Cambridge University

Language

English

Registration fee

\$20
Free for invited speakers and students

Public Talks

Speaker : Prof. Luke Barnes (PhD Astronomy, Cambridge University)

The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Life

Date : 16/6/2023 (Fri)

Time : 19:00-21:00

Venue : ICA, Shop 209-220,
2/F, 33 Marble Road,
North Point

Language : English

Registration fee : Free

Is the Universe an Accident?

Date : 17/6/2023 (Sat)

Time : 20:00-22:00

Venue : St. Andrew's Church (old church building)
138 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui,
Kowloon

Language : English

Registration fee : Free

About the Speaker

Luke A. Barnes is a theoretical astrophysicist, cosmologist, and postdoctoral researcher at Western Sydney University. He received his PhD in Astronomy from the University of Cambridge in 2009. He is a John Templeton Fellow. He has published papers in the fields of galaxy formation and the fine-tuning of the Universe for life. He is the author, with Geraint Lewis, of "A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos", published by Cambridge University Press. He has also published papers on the philosophy of science, and regularly engages in public outreach through public speaking, articles in the popular press, and social media.



Enquiry

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Organisers:

Supporting Organisers:



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◆ Conference Programme ◆

Day 1 Conference : 16/6/2023 (Friday)	
Venue: SCT 503 (LT 3), Cha Chi-ming Science Tower, Hong Kong Baptist University	
Time	Opening Ceremony: Chairperson: CHAN Man Ho
09:00-09:15	Officiating Guests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. LI Wai Keung, Dean of Faculty of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences; Research Chair Professor of Data Science, The Education University of Hong Kong - Prof. Stuart CHRISTIE, Executive Associate Dean; Professor, Office of the Dean of Arts and Department of English Language and Literature, Hong Kong Baptist University - Prof. KWAN Kai Man, Professor, Department of Religion and Philosophy; Director, Centre for Sino-Christian Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University Group Photo

Time	1 st Keynote Speech: Chairperson: Stephen TSUI
09:15-10:45	1. Luke BARNES, Theoretical Astrophysicist, Cosmologist, and Postdoctoral Researcher, Western Sydney University “Finding Design in Physics” ----- P. 5
10:45-11:15	Tea Break

Time	Session 1: Chairperson: Benedict S. B. CHAN
11:15-11:45	2. CHAN Man Ho, Associate Professor, Department of Science and Environmental Studies, The Education University of Hong Kong “Cosmology and Fine-tuning” ----- P. 5
11:45-12:15	3. Andrew BRENNER, Assistant Professor, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University “Is Nothing Really “Simpler and Easier” than Something?” ----- P. 5
12:15-12:45	Q & A
12:45-14:00	Lunch (Renfrew Restaurant, 2/F, David C. Lam Building, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Time	Session 2: Chairperson: Domenic MARBANIANG
14:00-14:30	4. Levi CHECKETTS, Assistant Professor, Department of Religion & Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University “The Consecration of the Ordos Desert: Teilhard's Mass on the World and the Prospect of a Cosmic Liturgy” ----- P. 6
14:30-14:45	Q & A
14:45-15:15	5. KWAN Kai Man, Professor, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University “A Further Reply to Robert Nola: Comparative Assessment of Theistic & Naturalistic Explanations” ----- P. 6
15:15-15:30	Q & A
15:30-16:00	Tea Break

Time	Session 3: Chairperson: LEE Chi Sing
16:00-16:30	6. Andrew T. LOKE, Associate Professor, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University “On God and the Beginning of the Universe: An Evaluation of Recent Discussions” - P. 7
16:30-17:00	7. Ahti-Veikko Juhani PIETARINEN, Professor, Department of Religion & Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University “On a Non-Teleophobic, Semiotic Cognition of Xenobots” ----- P. 7
17:00-17:30	Q & A

Day 2 Conference : 17/6/2023 (Saturday)

Venue: SCT 503 (LT 3), Cha Chi-ming Science Tower, Hong Kong Baptist University

Time	2 nd Keynote Speech: Chairperson: Andrew BRENNER
09:00-10:30	8. Luke BARNES, Theoretical Astrophysicist, Cosmologist, and Postdoctoral Researcher, Western Sydney University “How God can use Randomness” ----- P. 8
10:30-10:50	Tea Break

Time	Session 4: Chairperson: QU Li
10:50-11:10	9. Pan-chiu LAI, Professor, Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong “Origins of Morality: Theory of Evolution, Confucianism, and Chinese Christian Theology” ----- P. 8
11:10-11:30	10. LIU Xiaoting, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Beijing Normal University “大內卷語境下的生命價值與信仰生活” [in Putonghua] ----- P. 9
11:30-11:50	11. GUO Jing, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Dalian University of Technology “On the Relationship between Reason and Faith from Kant's Idea of the Kingdom of Ends” [in Putonghua] ----- P. 10
11:50-12:30	Q & A

◆ Public Talks ◆

1. The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Life

Speaker: Prof. Luke Barnes (PhD Astronomy, Cambridge University)

Date: 16/6/2023 (Fri)

Time: 19:00–21:00

Venue: ICA, Shop 209-220, 2/F, 33 Marble Road, North Point

Language: English

2. Is the Universe an Accident?

Speaker: Prof. Luke Barnes (PhD Astronomy, Cambridge University)

Date: 17/6/2023 (Sat)

Time: 20:00–22:00

Venue: St. Andrew's Church, 138 Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Language: English

About the speaker:

Luke A. Barnes is a theoretical astrophysicist, cosmologist, and postdoctoral researcher at Western Sydney University. He received his PhD in Astronomy from the University of Cambridge in 2009. He is a John Templeton Fellow. He has published papers in the fields of galaxy formation and the fine-tuning of the Universe for life. He is the author, with Geraint Lewis, of “A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos”, published by Cambridge University Press. He has also published papers on the philosophy of science, and regularly engages in public outreach through public speaking, articles in the popular press, and social media.

◆ Abstract ◆

1st Keynote Speech

Finding Design in Physics

Luke BARNES, Western Sydney University

The universe has the appearance of design. Earth and its life give an overwhelming impression of being arranged for a purpose. The modern world, we often told, has left the design intuition back in the 1800's, before Darwin, mechanistic laws, and the rise of the scientific enterprise. I will argue that this conclusion is mistaken: the success of science has strengthened the design intuition.

Session 1

Cosmology and Fine-tuning

CHAN Man Ho, The Education University of Hong Kong

Recent observations suggest that many fundamental physical constants and conditions in our universe are fine-tuned for life to exist. This provides an important piece of evidence to support the Design Argument and the existence of God in the philosophy of religion. However, the proposal of multiverse provides a naturalistic account of the fine-tuning phenomena which apparently challenges the Design Argument. In this talk, I will present some arguments from the perspective of the philosophy of science to evaluate the multiverse proposal. I will show that the multiverse proposal is not a good solution to the fine-tuning phenomena in our universe.

Is Nothing Really "Simpler and Easier" than Something?

Andrew BRENNER, Hong Kong Baptist University

It has often been thought that it is surprising that there is something rather than nothing because, as Leibniz put it, nothing is "simpler and easier" than something. The idea seems to be that, in virtue of its relative simplicity, an empty world is the default. In this paper I question this assumption. In fact, I argue, an empty world is not obviously simpler than a world in which things exist. In a world in which nothing exists, there are still various truths -- e.g., modal truths, moral truths, mathematical truths, truths regarding laws, truths regarding counterfactuals. These are non-ontological truths, because they are not truths regarding existing things. If something were to exist, however, then it could in principle simplify our total theory by explaining the obtaining of many or all of these non-ontological truths. If that's right, then a world in which something exists might very well be simpler than a world

in which nothing exists. While the existence of something complicates the world in one respect, it may simplify the world in various other respects, by explaining why various non-ontological truths obtain.

Session 2

The Consecration of the Ordos Desert: Teilhard's *Mass on the World* and the Prospect of a Cosmic Liturgy

Levi CHECKETTS, Hong Kong Baptist University

In the remote reaches of the Ordos Desert in Inner Mongolia, the paleoanthropologist Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin found himself without any of the elements necessary to offer mass on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1923. Instead of a traditional sacrifice of bread and wine, Teilhard offered the “Mass on the World,” effectively consecrating the desert around him, a fitting move for the feast day. The language of his mass seamlessly interweaves modern scientific language (atomic theory, cosmology, evolutionary biology) into liturgy without sacrificing the poetic form of the religious ritual.

Ian Barbour’s famous four models for science-theology dialogue typically neglects one crucial aspect of the problem of science and religion, namely that the language of science tends to be analytic, precise and quantitative. Religious language, on the other hand, trucks in transcendent language of the spiritual, the eternal, the gracious. This perhaps best explains Stephen Jay Gould’s preference for NOMA. But Teilhard models for us a way that liturgy and ritual can incorporate the language of science without moving into the realm of esotericism like kabbalah or gematria. Moreover, since liturgy is *theologia prima*, it is crucial for Christian liturgy to be able to adapt scientific worldviews into liturgy without either stiling the liturgical language, bastardizing the science, or reducing the mystery of God.

A Further Reply to Robert Nola: Comparative Assessment of Theistic & Naturalistic Explanations

KWAN Kai Man, Hong Kong Baptist University

Robert Nola has recently defended arguments against the existence of God on the basis of naturalistic explanations (NEs) of religious belief (Nola 2013, 2018). His arguments target at the alleged existence of God & argue to the conclusion of atheism from the superiority of NEs of religious beliefs over supernaturalistic explanations of religious belief. I have already provided a preliminary reply to this argument (Kwan 2022). In Nola (2018), he has elaborated his argument by discussing various criteria of good explanations, and then arguing that NEs of religious beliefs would satisfy those criteria better. In this paper, I provide a further reply to Nola by criticizing his arguments for the superiority of NEs over supernaturalistic explanations of religious belief.

On God and the Beginning of the Universe: An Evaluation of Recent Discussions

Andrew T. LOKE, Hong Kong Baptist University

Philosophical analysis is of vital importance for addressing the controversies in science and theology. This article evaluates the analyses concerning God and the beginning of the universe offered by a number of philosophers. It is shown that, while Linford is correct that establishing that physical reality has a finite past is not sufficient for establishing that physical reality had a beginning, the objections which Linford, Schmid, Oberle, and Wielenberg have offered against the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God can be rebutted. The examination of the objections and rebuttals demonstrates how a more careful philosophical analyses of the issues concerning the argument against infinite causal regress, personal identity, timelessness, the definition and reducibility of time, and the causal principle can contribute to the interaction between science and theology.

On a Non-Teleophobic, Semiotic Cognition of Xenobots

Ahti-Veikko PIETARINEN, Hong Kong Baptist University

Xenobots are living robots (biobots, anthrobots), synthetic lifeforms created out of frog embryo cells (Kriegman et al., 2020). They exhibit a range of novel behaviours and competences that emerge from non-genetic and non-evolutionary reasons, including smart motility and kinematic replication into functional self-copies previously unseen in any organism (Kriegman et al., 2021). Two fronts have caught attention recently. One is von Neumann's (1966) theory of self-reproduction, which as the authors of the Xenobot project notice becomes an easier task to achieve once parts of the von Neumann machine are conceived as living cells. The second is the absence of genetic material in Xenobots, suggesting that new competencies emerge from solutions to game-theoretic coordination problems by bioelectrical cell signalling. Both, of course, advance the fronts von Neumann pioneered. In this talk, I will highlight a third, hitherto unnoticed front: the semiotic meaning of cognition and the type of symbolic communication that these new forms of life support. In biosemiotics, the meaning is a triadic representation of the relationships between the sign, its generic object, and its effectual interpretant. With the bioelectric perspective to cell interactions, the cell suddenly appears a lot more semiotic machine than it would conceived purely from the genetical, hardware perspective. What is more, the competences exhibited in these novel forms are indirectly passed on – in Peirce's words "energetically projected" (Peirce, 1893) – to the offspring. Intelligent competences are imprinted kinematically rather than genetically, without congenital heritance or mutation. What directs the adaptation of Xenobots to novel environments is thus not through selective mechanisms but by continuously interacting "habits of behaviour"; meaningful changes in the offspring are attributable to habits that establish new features and bring novel organisms into harmony

with the general morphologies of the environment. Peirce's model for this was that of *agapistic* evolution. The connection to the previous two fronts is that agapism is evolution by co-operative problem solving, which bioelectric signalling enforces in somatic cases, leading to a novel form of self-reproduction in synthetic living materials that can transfer the descriptions of themselves to their descendants. Here the Baldwin-Lloyd Morgan Effect becomes the pronounced character in the survival value of biobots. In sum, integrated conceptualizations and vocabularies are needed to meaningfully discourse about how those values, competencies and ontogenetic adaptations that emerge non-individualistically through the recognition of the necessity of symbolic communication, can achieve co-operative solutions to continuous problems of life's adaptive strategies.

2nd Keynote Speech

How God can use Randomness

Luke BARNES, Western Sydney University

Can the universe be both purposeful and random? Does the existence of chaos, quantum indeterminacy, random mutations, and physical chance in the universe mean that there is no divine plan? I will show that these ideas are consistent – there is no contradiction between physical chance and divine purpose. More than that, I will show that randomness has positive virtues that a creator might use.

Session 4

Origins of Morality: Theory of Evolution, Confucianism, and Chinese Christian Theology

Pan-chiu LAI, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The question about moral origins is one of the most debated issues in contemporary religion-science dialogue. On the one hand, some scholars, particularly some of those with Christian faith, advocate some sorts of moral argument for the existence of God, arguing that human morality, especially the existence of objective moral values, logically requires the existence of God. On the other hand, some other scholars prefer to explain the origins of morality in terms of evolution and further argue that even the origins of religion or “god(s)” can be explained in terms of evolution. A crucial question is whether these two explanations - one apparently religious and the other seemingly scientific - are necessarily contradictory. A derived question is: If they are compatible, in what way(s)? This study aims to reconsider these questions through an analysis of the Confucian responses to the theory of evolution, especially the evolution explanation of moral origins.

To understand the Confucian responses, this study starts with the necessary background information about the biological theory of evolution and its implications for the

understanding of human morality. It will then provide a historical sketch of the introduction of the theory of evolution as well as "evolutionism" as a worldview into China, and an analysis of their potential challenges to the traditional Confucian position on the moral origins. Based on a review of the modern Confucian responses, this study will analyze and evaluate the Confucian attempts to integrate Confucianism with the evolution theory, especially the evolution explanation of moral origin. Through a comparative reflection on the existing Chinese Christian responses, this study will conclude with an exploration of the significance of the Confucian attempts for the contemporary religion-science dialogue as well as the development of Chinese Christian theology.

大内卷语境下的生命价值与信仰生活

刘孝廷 LIU Xiaoting, Beijing Normal University

三年新冠疫情解控之后，社会上暴增了大量自杀的人群，有个体的也有集体相约一起的自杀的，什么形式、类型、状况都有，让人应接不暇。这是非常痛苦的。如果我们追问原因，我然可以从疫情本身所带来的一些影响去讨论。目前这种讨论已经很多了；另一方面，我们是否也可以考虑一下这三年来人的属性随着技术和发展所发生的变化。比方说，人的存在越来越赛博格化，现在几乎没有谁不是赛博格。第二就是人类开始探索太空，其作为太空人的属性正在进入我们普通人的意识和定位中。许多人可能还没意识到这种变化，但马斯克确早已经意识到了，这需要为我们这种太空人的出现提供新的文化支撑。第三，从前是人和上帝在一起，现在人造了机器人，人就貌似成了上帝，人和机器人在一起，人的属性也发生了很多变化。我们旧有的从远古时代以来、从启蒙时代以来对人的各种各样的审思和界定都不够用了。许多人还没意识到这个问题的严峻性，可实际上很多事情都有这样一些因素的在背后鼓动，这是我们人所面临的新问题。可惜，我们现在的教育都还是数理的教育，这种工厂化抽象化符号化的教育使得人和自然甚至人跟自己的肢体都处在一种阻隔和紧张状态，带来各种各样的身心问题。中国人强调天人感应，说白了最直接的就是身心之间有互动有交流。如果身体不动，那么心和谁去交流？这就是今天通过身心关系看到的我们教育面临的根本问题。

解决这些问题有很多思路，如改变我们的科学观念、教育制度、知识模式等，都有功效。其中，让人们有一种信仰、有效的去过一种精神生活，大概是细微而根本的措施。我们已经看到，凡是信仰比较集中、状况相对比较密集的地方，自杀率也就下降，甚至假冒伪劣产品的数目都会降低。所以，不管人信什么，只要他有一个坚定的作为依托的信仰和禁忌，就比没有好，因为人类的精神需要一个依托。我们不管一个人信什么，而都把它看做是精神现象。我们的社会正在进入老年化和普遍有闲的时代，需要过一种独特的精神生活，可惜城市的生活已不可能像旧的时代那样在山川草

木当中去过。所以，我们需要研究各种各样的灵修、瑜伽、祷告等等，把它们引入到今天的精神生活领域当中。只是这也仍是杯水车薪，所以我们必须对我们的文明本身有一个更新的认识，就比如由核弹引发的核危机、气候导致的环境悬崖、基因引发的生命危机、CHaTGPT 引发的智能危机等，现在的人类文化或文明就得需要悬崖勒马、尽快调整。如果我们总是采取掩耳盗铃的方式，那这个问题就极其严重了。正是在这个意义上，我们提出一个比较大的问题，就是通过过一种精神生活引导化解已有的一些社会矛盾和精神矛盾。这个看起来见效速度不是很快，但却非常持久，所以我们提议在这方面引导人们确立一个很好的信仰，并且按照某种信仰的规范去过精神生活。或许有人会说，能不能再想些其他的办法儿呢？当然可以。我们的目标也不过是共渡难关之一种而已。

On the Relationship between Reason and Faith from Kant's Idea of the Kingdom of Ends

Jing GUO, Dalian University of Technology

Kant put forward a kingdom of ends, which refers to the systematic combination of different rational beings formed through moral laws. According to Kant's explanation, the kingdom not only has members, but also needs the head. Due to the fact that the head does not obey the will of another rational being, people believe that Kant's kingdom of ends point to the idea of God, thus providing a religious interpretation of the kingdom. This religious interpretation has been criticized by political interpretation which interpreted the kingdom of ends as a systematic union of rational individuals. Is the kingdom a normative and rational concept of a political community, or an ideal moral realm originally connected by God? What is the relationship between reason and faith revealed by Kant's idea of the kingdom of ends? The exploration of this issue can become a starting point for contemporary scientific and religious dialogue.

◆ List of Conference Participants ◆

(Last name in alphabetical order)

Luke BARNES	Western Sydney University
Andrew BRENNER	Hong Kong Baptist University
CHAN Man Ho	The Education University of Hong Kong
Benedict S. B. CHAN	Hong Kong Baptist University
Levi CHECKETTS	Hong Kong Baptist University
Stuart CHRISTIE	Hong Kong Baptist University
GUO Jing	Dalian University of Technology
KWAN Kai Man	Hong Kong Baptist University
Pan-chiu LAI	The Chinese University of Hong Kong
LEE Chi Sing	Hong Kong Baptist University
LI Wai Keung	The Education University of Hong Kong
LIU Xiaoting	Beijing Normal University
Andrew T. LOKE	Hong Kong Baptist University
Domenic MARBANIANG	Hong Kong Baptist University
Ahti-Veikko PIETARINEN	Hong Kong Baptist University
QU Li	Hong Kong Baptist University
Stephen TSUI	The Chinese University of Hong Kong

◆ Campus Map ◆



香港浸會大學
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

