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Editorial: Analytic Science-Engaged Theology

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Analytic theology and Science-Engaged Theology are two of the most exciting movements within theology in recent years, and have much in common. Both are interdisciplinary endeavours that engage other sub-disciplines (analytic philosophy and the natural and behavioural sciences, respectively) in the service of theology. Many (although not all) of the same scholars actively contribute to both movements. Furthermore, analytic theology and science-engaged theology both maintain the primacy and integrity of the theological task, whilst simultaneously inviting other disciplines to enrich theological reflection, criticism, and confession. Put another way, they are both forms of faith seeking understanding, which use the tools and methods from other disciplines in order to make incremental progress on specific theological questions (Leidenhag, 2023).

What these recent trends show is that theologians no longer need to (if they ever did) fear forms of rationalism or empiricism that, in previous generations, have been used to exclude theological discourse from the public square or academic University (Perry and Leidenhag 2023; Wood 2021). Clearly, theologians have long appealed to reason and experience as sources for theological reflection and correction. But in analytic theology and science-engaged theology, we can see that theologians can also use (as well as critique) the highly constrained, specialised, and systematized forms of reasoning and evidencing that is found in analytic philosophy and the natural sciences (Wood 2021, 81-108). Furthermore, movements argue that theology should engage with other disciplines, in a highly localized way, which humbly relies on the expertise of other disciplines without necessarily importing the metaphysical assumptions of the dialogue partner into theology. Analytic theology and science-engaged theology are complementary movements that signal that theology has now reached a kind of quiet confidence within (secular) research universities, such that she does not need to fight, flee or submit to other forms of inquiry.

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that there is scope for a further alliance of these movements in the form of *analytic science-engaged theology*. Such an analytic science-engaged theology would use the tools of both analytic

philosophy and some specific area of the empirical sciences within their theology. Such an alliance is possible not only because of what analytic theology and because of science-engaged theology share, but also because of what distinguishes them. I have argued elsewhere that analytic theology and science-engaged theology are actually two rather different kinds of things (Leidenhag 2023). Analytic theology is an intellectual tradition or school best identified not through necessary and sufficient conditions, but by pointing to particular scholars and the norms of discourse, they share with their interlocutors. By contrast, science-engaged theology is an intellectual disposition to use whatever the best the tools, expertise, and theories are for the theological topic under consideration. This distinction between analytic theology and science-engaged theology arises from an importance differences between their dialogue partners; analytic philosophy is itself an intellectual tradition that some theologian find it helpful to (partially) sit within and conform too. 'Science', even in the modern Anglo-American usage to refer to a particular subset of empirical disciplines that self-identify with the Scientific Revolution, is a more unruly and disparate collection of disciplines, traditions, and methods that can be made to intersect and diverge in an almost infinite number of ways. This means that although science-engaged theology may not always be analytic, analytic theologians (and theologians more widely) should always be science-engaged.

This special issue contains papers that exemplify fine-grained, interdisciplinary, constructive theological work of scholars from (broadly) within the analytic intellectual tradition engaging the empirical sciences to meet the aim of theology as faith seeking understanding.

Meghan Page's paper, 'How to Make Analytic Science-Engaged Theology an ASSET' opens this special issue with an important warning. So-called analytic science-engaged theologians need to heed the lessons of 20th century philosophy of science if they are to avoid naively resurrecting the corpse of positivism. As well as identifying potential tensions and even risks of combining analytic and science-engaged theology together, Page also offers a constructive solution. Inspired by the work of Penelope Maddy (2007), she argues that conceptual analysis and empirical tests should be reconfigured along more pragmatist lines such that they are not only complementary, but also inseparable. Page dubs this analytic-*synthetic* science-engaged theology (ASSET).

The six remaining papers are examples of analytic science-engaged theology, looking at a range of theological topics such as what it means to be human (Everhart and Penner et al. and), mental disorder (Cawdron, Finley, Hill), and moral formation (Pawl). As well as grouping these papers by board topic, overlaps can be seen in the different ways these authors employ analytic philosophy and psychological or biological studies as resources for Christian theology. As such, this special issue shows that there is not just one way for

theologians to engage other disciplines. Sometimes these disciplines are used to help theologians find practical solutions to challenges facing the church; sometimes these disciplines inspire theologians to extend, fill-out, or correct a specific doctrine; and at other times these disciplines present theology with new challenges that need to be responded to.

Myron Penner et al.'s and Kate Finley's papers both tackle pressing contemporary social issues, which at first glance may appear to present significant challenges to the church (e.g., gender identity/transsexuality, and mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar). However, grounded in their own empirical work as well as that of others in the relevant scientific discipline(s), both papers argue that theology, and the Christian church, can welcome and respond constructively to these realities in our congregations.

Myron A. Penner, April M. Cordero, and Amanda J. Nicholas are a multidisciplinary team (philosophy, biology, and chemistry) exploring how environmental factors in utero impact the sex expression of *Homo Sapiens*. They argue that sex determination in human beings is contingent, meaning that "the pathway of sex determined followed by human zygotes in the actual world is not the only possible pathway available to them" (p.18). For Penner, Cordero and Nicholas, the variance of human sex expression undermines philosophical and theological uses of science to ground gender-essentialism and provides support for the naturalness of sex transition.

Kate Finley notes that the potential *positive* effects of mental disorder on religious engagement has been relatively underexplored. To fill this lacuna, she conducted her own empirical studies (detailed in the article) to give more nuance and specificity to how sufferers make meaning out of their experiences of mental disorders in a way that has potentially positive effects on religious engagement. Given that the positive impact of mental disorder is by no means universal, Finley deals with objections and outlines avenues for future research to aid sufferers (and the religious communities they are a part of) to make positive meaning out of such experiences.

Preston Hill's and D. T. Everhart's papers use different areas of psychology to challenge or extend contemporary trends in systematic theology. Hill's focus is trauma-theology, which following the pioneering work of Shelly Rambo has employed pneumatology as its main doctrinal loci. Hill argues that such exclusive focus on pneumatology in order to articulate how it is that God can experience and empathise with trauma victims stands in tension with the importance of embodiment and embodied memory for PTSD. Hill argues that, instead, trauma-theology should locate divine trauma in the body of Jesus Christ. Everhart focus is on the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the brokenness of the image by sin. He uses social ontology in contemporary analytic philosophy and the psychology of collective action to extend relational-vocational accounts of the

image beyond their traditionally individualistic and anthropocentric scope, towards a vision of humanity's communion with all creation.

Tim Pawl's and Harvey Cawdron's papers each examine a puzzle presented to theology from contemporary psychology. Pawl points to a possible tension between theological and psychological answers to the question; how does one develop a virtuous habit? Christian moral wisdom has a long tradition of arguing that the motivation for developing virtuous habits must be union with God, not other benefits one may undoubtedly also derive from being virtuous. However, contemporary psychology of habit shows that habit formation requires (intrinsic, immediate, and unexpected) rewards to motivate them. He writes, "In short: The purity of intention required for Christian growth in virtue seems inconsistent with the reward structure required for acting informed by the habit formation literature." (p.10) Pawl then evaluates two strategies for resolving this tension, arguing in favour of a distinction between the period of disposition acquisition and the period of disposition refinement which may include a so-called 'Dark Night of the Soul'.

Harvey Cawdron's paper examines a quite different kind of challenge for Christian doctrine; namely, the challenge of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) for Christian accounts of the afterlife. Using both psychological and philosophical literature, Cawdron argues that it is possible that at least some of the alters within DID patients should be considered distinct persons, sometimes with markedly different moral characters and beliefs from one another. As such, Cawdron asks what whether the eternal destination of these alters could be different from one another given the Christian idea of resurrection into the same pre-mortem body. In searching for a response to this problem, Cawdron brings DID into dialogue with various aspects of Christian eschatology, including views of escaping heaven and hell, the beatific vision, post-mortem healing, and the nature of bodily identity in the resurrection.

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