



The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science  
Founded 1954

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2020

YOU WILL COME BACK!



IT'S TIME TO THINK ABOUT COMING TO THE 2020 CONFERENCE

**Naturalism —**  
***as Religion, within Religions, or without Religion?***  
The 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of IRAS  
June 27 – July 4, 2020  
Star Island, New Hampshire, USA  
Co-chairs: Willem B. Drees, Barbara Whittaker-Johns, and  
Abigail Fuller

**What are the consequences of science-inspired naturalism for religion?** In this year's IRAS conference, we will explore and evaluate religious and non-religious options available to those who take science seriously. Briefly, these could be characterized as replacement, reform, and rejection. There will be plenary lectures, short papers, and book seminars (see "Outstanding Speakers," below, for more on the rich diversity of plenary presentations).



**Time to register!**

As in previous years, our conference will offer opportunities to participate in the IRAS choir, explore your artistic side in the Art Barn, brave the early morning "polar bear swim," kayak and canoe, and join in bird walks, geology walks, and more. A structured morning and afternoon program will offer youth, from pre-school to high school age, meaningful ways to connect with one another and the island. **New this year, our week will offer daily avenues for intergenerational engagement.** Come join in the best of both worlds: engage in substantial intellectual reflection and dialogue, while enjoying a relaxed, refreshing week on a beautiful island off the New England coast.

<https://starisland.thankyou4caring.org/pages/iras-registration>



Register today for a chance to win free room and board! What are you waiting for?

Here's how it works:

- Register online for any 2020 conference before April 1 at midnight and your name will automatically be entered to win FREE room & board for your conference stay.
- If you are mailing in your registration, the envelope must be postmarked 4/1/20.
- Every person who has registered at any point before April 1 for the 2020 season will be entered - no additional action needed.
- One winner will be selected and the cost of one room & board fee will be provided.

## Outstanding Speakers

**Owen Flanagan** will give the opening lecture, on multiple meanings of 'naturalism' in relation to our understanding of mind and morality. In a second address, he will also speak on the possibility of a naturalized Buddhism. Owen is a philosopher at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, where he is also associated with Neurobiology, Psychology, Neuroscience, and the Graduate Program in Literature.

**Ursula Goodenough's** lecture is titled *Taking Nature to Mind and Heart*. She will give a plenary lecture on religious naturalism, as inspired by the sciences and as a source of moral ecological engagement. She will also speak, perhaps jointly with some of her colleagues from the Religious Naturalist Association, on religious naturalism as a movement. She has chaired six IRAS-conferences, including a series on emergence. Her book *The Sacred Depths of Nature* was very significant in the rise of science-inspired religious naturalism.

**Sarah Lane Ritchie** is a theologian who lectures on theology and science at Edinburgh University in Scotland. Her book *Divine Action and the Human Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) engages critically the idea that the mind would be particularly significant when envisaging God's relation to the world, a view advocated by Philip Clayton and others. For this work, she earned the ESSSAT Research Prize 2018. She is fascinated by the question whether theistic naturalism provides the resources to affirm the sheer physicality of the human person.

**James C. Ungureanu**, an intellectual historian, will discuss the way naturalistic ways of understanding religion emerged and developed in the nineteenth century, especially within Protestantism. He is an Honorary Research Fellow in

the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently working on a second book on the role biblical criticism played in the science-religion debate, from the Protestant Reformation to the present.

**Carol Wayne White** is Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Bucknell University, specializing in Poststructuralist Philosophies, Process Theism and Philosophy, Religious Naturalism, Science and Religion, and Critical Theory and Religion. She has written about African American religious naturalism and feminism and religion, and she is currently writing a book that explores the tenets of deep ecology and insights of religious naturalism expressed by contemporary American nature poets and writers.

**Janet Newton** will be our Chapel Speaker. She is minister of First Parish Church of Berlin, MA, a Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ congregation. She has come to ministry after many years as a high school English and philosophy teacher.

More information about the speakers and co-chairs is available on the IRAS website, <https://www.iras.org/2020-conference.html>

## CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS

**Willem B. Drees**, 2020 conference co-chair, will give the concluding lecture on science-inspired naturalism and its consequences for philosophy and religion. He is professor of philosophy of the humanities at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, where he served as dean of its School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. Previously, he was professor of philosophy of religion at Leiden University, editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, and President of ESSSAT, the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (2002-2008).

**Rev. Dr. Barbara Whittaker-Johns**, 2020 conference co-chair, is a Unitarian Universalist minister, and recently completed five years as President of IRAS. She has co-chaired five conferences and served as the Chapel Speaker for four. Since 1985, her partner, Frank Toppa, has also attended IRAS conferences, often as our Music Director. Their son Isaac began attending IRAS conferences in 1989, as an infant. They live on Cape Cod where Barbara's favorite activity is clamming.

**Abigail Fuller** serves as conference co-chair for operations. She is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Southern Maine, with a particular interest in nonviolent social movements, including grassroots movements for racial, gender, and economic justice in the United States. She, with her husband

Neil Wollman and their children, have attended many IRAS conferences and served IRAS in multiple roles.

## THERE'S MORE!

Three **Shapley-Booth fellowships** have been awarded. **Mark Hoeltner** will use cognitive science, neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology to study experiences described as encounters with a 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans'. **Dong Zhao** will speak on the modernization of Chinese Buddhism in interaction with science, especially the work of the Venerable Taixu (1890-1947). **Curtis Craig** considers survey data on faith, belief, and nature, to analyze the potential for religious naturalism.

Well **over thirty more short papers** have been accepted for presentation. These presentations will be scheduled in late morning sessions, following the plenary talks, and in the early afternoon. We will also have a **panel** discussion addressing three views of religious naturalism. David Spiro, of the Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society and the Washington Spinoza Society, will speak on Spinoza and Judaism. Maynard Moore, Methodist minister and IRAS Council member, will speak on a Christian naturalism consistent with classical philosophical and theological approaches. Imam Johari Abdul Malik will present a classic Muslim view, based on the Qur'an and the affirmation that God is the author of all creation.

There will be **two book seminars**, each with two dedicated sessions, to discuss manuscripts in preparation. One is by Arthur Petersen, current *Zygon* editor, on the question how the practices of science, religion, and public policy deal with uncertainty and ignorance. The manuscript is titled *Uncertainty, Nature, and God: A Transcendental Naturalistic Approach to Science, Religion, and Public Policy*. Among the authors who inspired this writing are neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert, pragmatist William James, and empirical philosopher Bruno Latour. The other book seminar explores a manuscript by Karl E. Peters, who has served IRAS in many capacities and served as *Zygon's* second editor. He seeks to articulate a Christian form of religious naturalism; his working title is *A Christianity for Living Only in Today's World*.

## REGISTRATION

- To register now, go to the Star Island web site:  
<https://starisland.thankyou4caring.org/pages/iras-registration>.
- Star Island offers discounts for first time attendees, former Pelicans, folks who haven't come in a while, and others. Check out the discounts at

<http://starisland.org/discounts/>.

- IRAS offers a few scholarships for students and for seniors (over 55) who are first-time attendees. For more information, see <https://www.iras.org/fellowshipscholarships.html>.
- For registration questions, contact Marion Griswold, [mbgriswold@yahoo.com](mailto:mbgriswold@yahoo.com).

Newsletter Editor: Carol Orme-Johnson  
Editorial Supervision: Jennifer E. Whitten  
Text: Willem Drees  
Photo Credits: David Klotz