SASRF 2016 participants

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| Name | Surname | Topic | E-mail | Abstract |
| Wessel | Bentley | Claiming Imago Dei for ourselves: A theological critique of Christian anthropocentric cosmology. | Bentlw1@unisa.ac.zaUNISA | Rooted in biblical passages like Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 5:1-3 and Genesis 9:6, Christian anthropology advocates that humanity is ‘created in the image of God’. This claim distinguishes humankind from all other life forms, not even to speak of the hierarchical separation between the classifications of “organic” and “inorganic” material. Humankind is the only species to make this assertion, and while it elevates itself to a position of distinct privilege, has proven to be the most devastating and destructive biological presences ever to have walked the face of the earth. In light of present scientific knowledge, is the phrase ‘created in the image of God’ a stumbling block in the science-and-theology discourse? The notion of being specifically and intentionally ‘created’ by an intelligent and causal God, with the purpose of making humanity God’s co-creators and stewards of the ‘created’, leads to no other conclusion for humanity but to think of itself as being distinctly special. If anything about humanity needs to be redeemed, it is this understanding of self.  |
| Olehile | Buffel | The therapeutic value of rituals in the face of death and its painful reality in the African context: A phenomenological investigation of death, mourning and associated rituals | Buffeoa@unisa.ac.zaUNISA | Death and rituals are constant phenomena in life and that has always been the case throughout history. Using a phenomenological approach the article investigates death, mourning and rituals as experienced by Africans in the South African context. In addition to study of relevant literature related to death, mourning, burial rites and other rituals, in-depth interviews will be conducted in a black congregation in Mamelodi, South Africa. Furthermore the article attempts to grapple with death and its meaning, mourning as well as associated rituals that help the bereaved to come to terms with the painful reality of death. Human beings have always engaged in rituals as Lee Berger et al (2010) pointed out at the discovery of Homo Naledi in 2015 that “individuals were always capable of ritualised behaviour”. The rituals are often seen as therapeutic and do not only help the bereaved (the living) to cope with the pain of death but to move on with their lives, as they continue to have a special relationship with “the departed” or the ancestors who are treated with respect. The African understanding of death is that death does not end life but continues life in another realm. Death does not alter or end the life or personality of an individual but only causes a change in its conditions (Ngubane 1977). The departed (living dead) continue to live in the community and communicate with their families. They continue to be consulted on important occasions and called upon to protect, guide, intervene and even intercede on behalf of the living. Within an African context, the dead are regarded as ancestors and they are treated with great respect and sometimes fear as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living. What happens in an African context happens despite what Western civilisation and Christianity are teaching about death being the end of life and about certain rituals being undesirable and contrary to Christian beliefs.  |
| Cornel W. | Du Toit | Has evolution prepared us to deal with death? On consciousness and death. | dtoitcw@unisa.ac.zaUNISA | Human consciousness represents the zenith of evolutionary development. We know that almost all life forms have some form of awareness and that sophisticated degrees of consciousness may be present in the higher primates. From the perspective of successful survival and the evolution of human consciousness as we know it was not an evolutionary necessity. Evolution is blind and could not ‘foresee’ the ramifications that accompany higher consciousness like the development of language, sophisticated cognition and concomitant questions like the meaning of life and the origin and destiny of all things. But this sophisticated cognition was coloured by affect (basic emotions are typical of all mammals) and this led for example in the case of human attachment to questions about the fate of loved ones who had befallen us. Was this a precursor to religion? These questions will be discussed against the backdrop of recent views on consciousness. |
| JF | Durand | The contribution of Homo naledi to our understanding of human origins and behaviour | fdurand@uj.ac.zaUniversity of Johannesburg | It has been postulated that Homo naledi should be included as the most recent addition to the human family tree. The taxonomic position of this discovery will be assessed by comparison to known fossil hominins from South Africa and East Africa. The geology of the region and depositional history of the fossils from the Rising Star Cave system will be reviewed and compared to other hominin sites in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. Certain behavioural traits ascribed to Homo naledi, specifically the controversial claim that they buried their dead, will be discussed. This will include an overview of early hominin behaviour such as the origins of technology, the occupation of caves and societal structure. |
| Jaco | Gericke | Generic 'spirit' as trans-divine elemental (meta-)physical category in the Hebrew Bible - a comparative-philosophical perspective | 21609268@nwu.ac.zaNorthwest University | From the perspective of the history of religion, the notion of ruach in the Hebrew Bible was not originally theological in its associative meaning. Looking at the conceptual evolution of the generic term shows that it first denoted a (meta-)physical category that included a complex variety of overlapping transdivine natural forces. Only later was it equated with certain mereological parts supervening on a diversity of divine phenomena. So what can be concluded from uses of spirit in the generic sense in the Hebrew Bible in the context of a pre- and supratheistic cosmologies? In addition, how do these findings compare - and might be of interest - to discussions of spirit in contemporary scientific and philosophical subdisciplines? |
| Gys M. | Loubser | The Dynamics of Transforming Theologies | gysloubser@gmail.comUniversity of Pretoria | In this article I argue that we can illuminate the dynamics of transforming theologies by shifting the focus from theories to persons. By describing theologies as complex communities in relation to their environments we engage the real world problems that inspire theological revision and development. I also argue that theatre and drama helps us to describe the real world problems within these environments - reflecting and creating our social-political and social-economic structures. I illustrate this point by tracing theology and drama in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s and similar links between Afrikaans theology and drama in South Africa during the 1950s to 1990s. I conclude by asking what our dramatists reflect about our environment today and how theologians might respond. |
| Johann-Albrecht | Meylahn | Fossils and tombs and how they haunt us | jmeylahn@lantic.netUniversity of Pretoria | Fossils and tombs in museums fascinate us and haunt us with their secrets. The discovery of the remains of Homo Naledi, found, as argued by some, in an ancient burial chamber, promises to reveal secrets of an un-remembered past, thus offering clues for our human present and maybe influence our human future. The paper will not engage directly with what Homo Naledi might contribute to the various science-religion-theology conversations but rather engage with the grammars of these conversations, and rather ask the question, why: why do tombs and fossils haunt us? The paper will bring into the conversation Derrida's interpretation on tombs and fossils, his hauntology, as well as the fascination with secrets. It will not offer an interpretation of Naledi, but rather ask the question why she inspires (haunts) the belief that she has something to offer the science-religion conversation (which I believe she does), or why she inspires the belief that such discoveries make no difference to religious views of creation, for example. Whichever way, the dead, and specifically those dead to human memory, when "recalled", haunt us and disturb us with their secrets. |
| Ilongo Fritz | Ngale | Hunting, gathering, toolmaking, and art as expressions and experiences of being and doing through homogenizing, crystallizing and self-transcending forms of consciousness | cactuso2001@yahoo.comUniversity of Buea | This article explores the evolution of consciousness as directly correlated to triple stages of being, and equally expressed through four stages of doing, that is, hunting, gathering, toolmaking, and art. The methodology is qualitative theoretical analyses, articulated around Jean Gebser's seminal work, The Ever-Present Origin. Hunting and gathering are expressions of doing which are derived from states of being characterized by homogenization, unity and ‘we’, and a magical, unitary ‘self-dissolving’ consciousness. Toolmaking on the other hand is evolved from a mythical consciousness of duality, polarity, symbolism, and a state of being qualified by ‘crystallization of the I.’ Lastly, art is a function of a consciousness of ‘self-transcendence’, ‘I and I’, idealization, and a transpersonal state of being. The article concludes by positing that hunting, gathering, toolmaking, and art are ‘forms of the movement of consciousness’, that the latter is ‘movement of forms of expression of consciousness’, and that being is ‘form of the movement of forms.’ |
| Klaus | Nürnberger | Eschatology as a manifestation of human uniqueness | info@klaus-nurnberger.comUKZN(?) | All living creatures display the urge to survive and develop their full potential built into their system by evolution. This urge implies a certain future orientation: what has not yet become (or what ought not to have become, or what ought not to become) is transcended towards what ought to become. In this respect the human being is not unique. However, humans are indeed unique in terms of the level of emergence that they have reached and at which this urge expresses itself. The genetic survival and flourishing of the species within a conducive environment, the biological survival and flourishing of the clan and the wider community, and the survival and flourishing of the identity of the individual are levels of emergence that constitute the multilayered infrastructure on which human spiritual life emerges and evolves. Humans have the capacity to transcend the given backward into the past, forward into the future, beyond their immediate spatial environment, beyond the power at their disposal, beyond the level of insight reached and the expertise attained to manipulate reality. Temporal and spatial dimensions of consciousness are not necessarily absent in other sentient beings, but the scope, depth and complexity of human spirituality goes beyond that of higher animals by various degrees of magnitude.The development of a vision of what ought to become is occasioned by the experience of what ought not to have become or what has not yet become to a satisfactory degree. It is an expression of the urge to reach personal and collective authenticity within an authentic life world. The validity of the content of this vision is then anchored in the intuition that the ultimate Source and Destiny of reality as a whole has benevolent intentions (or at least a positive rationale if it is not deemed to be a personal being). As the trajectory of biblical future expectations demonstrates, this future orientation can begin at the level of the basic needs of a nomadic clan, grow in scope to encompass the needs of the tribe, the ethnic group, all ethnic groups, humanity and finally (in apocalyptic) reality as such and as a whole. Simultaneously it can grow in depth, quality and consistency. Initially future expectations are geared to an envisioned future within immanent history. But continuing non-fulfilment and frustration with the ambiguity of experienced reality may prompt the seer to overshoot what seems probable or even possible at any point in space and time. Since the assumed benevolent motivation of the transcendent contradicts experienced reality, such an overshoot expresses a defiant ‘nevertheless’, which is typically expressed in unlikely metaphorical, mysterious, or mythical terms. Such a blind leap into the sphere of the transcendent leads humans to an emotional and spiritual emancipation from the inevitabilities and constraints of experienced reality, declaring the latter to be non-determinative and contingent: the limitations of this world are not the limitations of the ultimate (transcendent) Source and Destiny of reality. While the leap into the seemingly improbable or impossible is immensely important for human survival, emancipation and progress, it may have counterproductive consequences if it constructs an alternative world of pure fantasy (as in apocalyptic), rather than aiming at the transformation of the existing world into what it ought to become. In this respect the realism of the natural sciences can help faith sober up: the current world (and the human being as part of this world) may indeed come to an end, but it will not be replaced by a world (and a human being) without entropy, suffering and death. |
| Lobiane Francis C. | Rakotsoane | Identifying the Nature and Meaning of Symbolism Involved in the Rituals and Ceremonies Performed in Connection with Human Death-Handling in Southern Africa | lobiane@yahoo.co.ukNational university of Lesotho | The act of burying the dead and mourning their death as universally practised by human beings wherever they are or have been, appears to be a very complex symbolic act that sets them aside as religious beings. It is an act that is not only rich in symbolism but also reveals a lot, epistemologically speaking, about the nature of transcendence embraced by a given ethnic group when the symbolism involved is correctly interpreted and understood. This paper is an attempt to identify the nature of symbolism involved in the act of burying the dead and mourning their death as practised in Africa with special reference to the Sesotho speaking people of Southern Africa. Working within the framework of Schmidt’s concepts of presentational and representational symbolism, the paper will identify the symbolism involved in the various rituals and ceremonies performed in connection with death as the rite of passage in the context of the Southern Sotho’s communities and attempt to unpack the nature of the transcendence such symbolism generally points to. |
| Detlev | Tonsing | Homo faber or homo credente? What defines humans, and what could Homo naledi contribute to this debate? | detlevt@gmail.comNone | The transition from pre-human to human has, for a long time, been associated with tool use and construction. The implicit self-definition of humans in this is that of planned control over life-world. This is reflected in the work of Hanna Arendt on the Homo Faber and the novel by Max Frisch of that name. However, this definition has become problematic in a number of ways: Planned tool use has been seen to occur outside the human species and the focus on control of the environment has become suspect due to the environmental crisis. The burial practices of Homo Naledi indicate high-level awareness, and social communication, with little tool use being evident. The paper asks whether this might this be an occasion to redefine our conception of what it means to be human away from the focus on mastery and control and toward including trust, also religious trust, as the true mark of humanity.  |
| Daniël P | Veldsman | “Welc(h)omo Naledi”! What does our newest relative have to say to us? | Danie.veldsman@up.ac.zaUniversity of Pretoria | The new hominin fossil called Homo Naledi that was discovered two years ago in the Dinaldi Chamber (South Africa) has been welcomed into the species of human relative on 10 Sept 2015. Welcomed? Representing at least 15 individuals with most skeletal elements repeated multiple times, this is the largest assemblage of a single species of hominins yet discovered in Africa. Does however these bones represent a new Homo species? It is this question that I have tried to capture in my playful grammatically incorrect title “Welc(ho)mo Naledi”! However, it is not this question that I will endeavour to answer, but a very different theological implication. My aim in this article is definitely not to argue an opinion on the diverse question regarding the discovery of the fossil skeletons from the Dinaldi Chamber. My aim is related but different, much more modest, restricted and focused. It is to ask “on the other historic side” (that is, beyond the fossil record!) of Naledi about human distinctiveness and symbolic behaviour. Within the broader contemporary philosophical-theological discourses on anthropology and specifically the fundamental question, “Are we special?”, I would like ultimately to take on the intriguing theological implications for soteriology from the Naledi (and earlier) findings. |

***Homo naledi* – the strength of the case – deliberate body disposal or is the case still open?**

Prof. Lee R. Berger FRSSAf ASSAf

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&

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The description of the new species of primitive hominin *Homo naledi* in 2015 by Berger et al. brought to light a previously unknown hominin exhibiting a surprising mosaic of primitive and derived characters within the lineage. With a small australopith-sized brain, small but primitive teeth, ape-like shoulders, a primitive pelvis, human proportioned but curved hands, and human like lower legs and feet, *H. naledi* was truly an unexpected addition to the hominin family tree. Its total morphological package was interpreted by us as being most closely related to both the earliest hominins yet attributed to our genus, as well as more primitive specimens of *H. erectus*, though unlike either group when the entirety of its anatomy is taken into account. Most surprisingly however, was the context of the find. Recovered from deep in a nearly inaccessible underground chamber, the now more than 1700 remains of at least 15 individuals reason for being in this unusual situation is mysterious to say the least. My colleagues and I eliminated as probable most usual causes attributed to the formation of South African primitive hominin bearing sites. Carnivores and scavengers were eliminated by the absence of appropriate taphonomic signals on any bones recoverd. A catastrophic event could be eliminated by the evidence showing the deposit accumulated over time, and the absence of markers indicating a cause of death. The demographic profile of the assemblage neither supports the catastrophe hypothesis, nor a death trap hypothesis. The absence of water deposited sediments or lateral flow precludes re-deposition from elsewhere. Finally the near mono-specific nature of the deposit points to extreme difficulty of access for any animals, certainly any medium- or large-sized terrestrial vertebrates other than hominins. We concluded, after eliminating the probable, that the most likely hypothesis is that this small brained non-human hominin deliberately, and in a ritualized (repeated) fashion, disposed of its dead in the Dinaledi chamber. Such behaviour attributed for the first time to a clearly non-human species of animal, which itself presents a primitive morphology within the genus *Homo*, may have implications for our understanding of the origins of such behaviours previously thought to be associated only with the largest brained members of our genus, namely *Homo sapiens* and our closest relatives. The evidence for our reaching this conclusion will be presented, and the implications should this hypothesis be proved correct for understanding the origins of such behaviours in our species will be discussed.

Berger *et al*. 2015. *Homo naledi*, a new species of the genus *Homo* from the Dinaledi Chamber, South Africa. Elife, 4, p.e09560.