

TEMPLETON REPORT

NEWS FROM THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

March 4, 2009

The Humble Approach Initiative

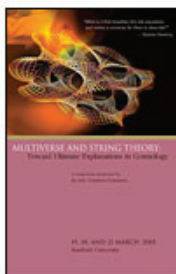
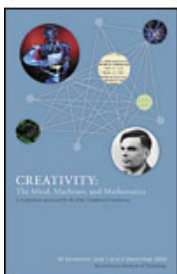
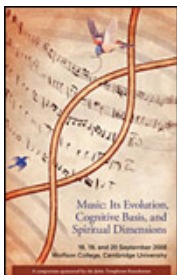
In January, a dozen scholars gathered in Cape Town, South Africa for a four-day symposium entitled “*Homo Symbolicus*: The Dawn of Language, Imagination, and Spirituality.” They were there to discuss the implications of a recent discovery that sent shock waves through the archaeological world: 75,000-year-old shell beads and engraved ochre found at the Blombos Cave, about 200 miles east of the meeting site. The beads and engravings provide fairly conclusive evidence of symbolic expression among human beings 40,000 years earlier than many researchers had thought possible.

The gathering was part of the John Templeton Foundation’s Humble Approach Initiative, a program that has sponsored more than thirty interdisciplinary symposia on a range of themes since its inception in 1998. Small groups of scientists and scholars have met to explore such topics as string theory and the idea of a multiverse, creativity in science and technology, the evolutionary and spiritual significance of music, theological imagination in science fiction, and the relationships among modernity, religion, and secularism. According to Dr. Mary Ann Meyers, the program’s director and a senior fellow at the Templeton Foundation, the Humble Approach symposia are “intended as a corrective to parochialism. They reflect Sir John Templeton’s belief that in the quest to comprehend what he called ‘foundational realities,’ scientists, philosophers, and theologians have much to learn from one another.”



Images courtesy of Chris Henshilwood and Francesco d’Errico

Artifacts discovered at Blombos Cave in South Africa by Christopher Henshilwood and his team of archaeologists: shell beads (top) and a red ochre rock engraved with geometric patterns.



Programs from four Humble Approach Initiative symposia.

The Cape Town symposium on *homo symbolicus* was chaired by Christopher Henshilwood, the director of the Blombos Cave project and South African Research Chair in the Origins of Modern Human Behavior at the Institute for Human Evolution at the University of the Witwatersrand. Participants included Justin Barrett of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at Oxford University; Paul Mellars, a professor of prehistory and human evolution at Cambridge University; Emily Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, a psychologist and language researcher at the Great Ape Trust in Iowa; and David Sloan Wilson, a biologist and anthropologist at Binghamton University. Several of the symposium participants were quoted in an article on the Blombos Cave findings in the January 30, 2009 issue of *Science*.

The symposium explored a range of ambitious questions, including: How are we to know when language, symbolic behavior, and spirituality became a part of the repertoire of human behavior? What can currently available evidence of physical and cultural evolution tell us about such matters? In what ways is the human spiritual sense related to the evolution of language, of extra-linguistic symbolic behavior, and of other elements of cognitive capacity? And what kinds of research and theory-building might be most helpful for addressing such difficult questions?

Other recent programs of the Humble Approach Initiative have examined equally challenging themes. A symposium at Princeton University in October 2007, for example, brought together fifteen scholars to discuss the pioneering work of the mathematician John von Neumann, who established the field of game theory. “Games, Groups, God(s) and the Global Good” was chaired by Simon Levin, the Moffett Professor of Biology at Princeton and director of its Center for Biocomplexity. Participants included Martin Nowak, founding director of the Center for Evolutionary Dynamics at Harvard; Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Laurence S. Rockefeller Professor of Philosophy at Princeton; the Nobel Prize-winning economist Eric Maskin, also of Princeton; and John Hare, the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale. Their discussion covered questions such as: How do groups form, how do institutions come into being, and when do moral norms and practices emerge? Are there ways to distinguish “good” from “evil” normative behaviors? And how can game theory model the concept of moral transformation in groups as well as individuals?

The next Humble Approach symposium will be held in Istanbul in April. Entitled “Light from Light,” it will explore the physics and metaphysics of light. As the Templeton Foundation’s Dr. Meyers explains, “light has served as a metaphor for ultimate reality in all of the world’s religions, and light is also fundamental to our understanding of physical reality. It is always thrilling to see how scientists, philosophers, and theologians can use this kind of conversation to sharpen and expand their own thinking.”

NOTEBOOK

Enterprising Advice for Rwanda

In February, the Social Equity Venture (SEVEN) Fund, a major grantee of the Templeton Foundation, announced the winners of its student essay competition. Andreaata Muforo, a second-year MBA student at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business, was awarded a \$20,000 scholarship in the graduate category. William Kalema, a junior majoring in history at Northwestern University, won a \$10,000 scholarship in the undergraduate category. Essays were submitted by students from over 450 institutions in 35 countries.



Andreaata Muforo

William Kalema

For the competition, students were asked to review a video of President Paul Kagame of Rwanda discussing his vision for the country’s private sector and then to assume the role of policy advisor in the area of pro-entrepreneurship development. The essays by Muforo and Kalema will be presented to President Kagame for his review.

“Our intention was to create a global discussion among the world’s brightest and most action-oriented students over what makes good policy in a progressive emerging economy; our two winners, both of whom are African, represent all 650 entrants with great distinction,” said Michael Fairbanks, co-founder of the SEVEN Fund.

“Spiritual Enterprise” and the Economic Crisis

Theodore Roosevelt Malloch, the author of *Spiritual Enterprise: Doing Virtuous Business*, was the guest at a Templeton Book Forum event at the Harvard Club in New York City on February 17. In a wide-ranging conversation with Matthew Bishop, the American business editor and New York bureau chief of the *Economist*, Malloch discussed the arguments of his book and their relevance to today’s economic crisis.



In *Spiritual Enterprise*, Malloch suggests that free-market economies thrive in part because of their “profound connection to a fundamentally religious frame of mind.” He develops the notion of “spiritual capital” to describe the distinctive virtues that sustain capitalist relationships. From Wal Mart to IBM and across a range of religious traditions, Malloch shows how companies that operate according to a spiritually-based ethic have outperformed their competitors.

For video clips of the conversation between Theodore Roosevelt Malloch and Matthew Bishop, visit http://www.templeton.org/video/bishop_malloch/1.html.

Articles of Interest

- “Is Capitalism Moral? A Conversation with John Gray, Jagdish Bhagwati, and Bernard-Henri Lévy, with Stephanie Flanders,” *The American Interest*, March/April 2009, based on the Templeton Foundation’s December 2008 debate in London.
- “Dialogue: The Greening of Jesus,” by Templeton–Cambridge Journalism Fellow Mark I. Pinsky, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Winter 2009.
- “Keeping (or Finding) the Faith,” *Time*, 23 February 2009, about the relationship between spirituality and health, with discussion of the Templeton Foundation and JTF grantee Harold Koenig.
- “Resolving the Paradox of Thrift,” *Time*, 12 February 2009, quoting JTF grantee David Blankenhorn: “Wringing debt out of our economy at every level is a painful and inevitable process, and it isn’t going to be solved by charging more things at the supermarket.”
- “An Unlikely Champion: Was setting up PEPFAR—a massive HIV treatment programme—the best thing that President Bush ever did?,” *Nature*, 15 January 2009, featuring JTF grantee Edward Green: “Green and others argue that AIDS spread more slowly in regions where people are encouraged to favour monogamous relationships—even if they are serial relationships—over multiple concurrent long-term sexual relationships.” Green has been a leader in “advancing the idea that people need to change their behaviour in ways more radical than the wider use of condoms.”



For more information, write to communications@templeton.org.

JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

SUPPORTING SCIENCE - INVESTING IN THE BIG QUESTIONS