

Humility, Wisdom, & Grace in Deep Time

A Conversation between Theology and Evolutionary Anthropology

Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study | Stellenbosch, South Africa | 19-22 January 2017

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Purpose



Above: Powerful categories of evidence for symbolically mediated behaviour, variously described as 'modern' or 'cognitively modern' human behaviour, are geometric or iconographic representations. After 40,000 years ago such evidence is well documented in much of the Old World and is widely considered as typifying 'modern human culture,' but earlier evidence is rare. In Africa, this includes deliberately engraved ochre pieces from c. 100 000 - 75,000 year-old levels at Blombos Cave in the Western Cape. The crosshatched piece depicted here is 75 000 years old. These finds, taken together with other engraved objects reported from other southern African sites, suggest that symbolic intent and tradition were present in this region at an earlier date than previously thought.

Image courtesy of Chris Henshilwood and Francesco d'Errico

This symposium is linked to an ongoing project, funded by the John Templeton Foundation and others, on the evolution of human wisdom that is seeking answers to such key questions as: Where did human wisdom come from and how did it begin? Are the changing evolutionary patterns in human relationships, understood through the lens of complex social negotiation and symbol making integral to human evolution, also an expression of human wisdom? The symposium taking place in Stellenbosch expands on this research and asks: What might be the relationship between the virtues of wisdom and humility and could the latter be tracked in the evolutionary record along with wisdom? Furthermore, does the integration of theological approaches into such questions shape, facilitate, and change answers to them?

Working definitions for wisdom, humility, and grace developed by the symposium planners are these: Wisdom is the pattern (and ability) of successful complex decision-making in navigating social networks and dynamic niches in human communities. Humility is the capacity for openness to the other and right assessment of one's own capabilities, and we postulate that it is a prerequisite for the full development of wisdom. Grace, understood theologically, is an experience of capabilities that seem to exceed those endowed by ordinary human experience.

While we have an idea of how to track wisdom in the evolutionary record, this symposium hopes to discern if there are perhaps distinctive, indeed, 'advanced' forms of wisdom associated with humility that also leave their mark. As grace is likely to be concomitant with religious experience, and thus would only be possible following the appearance of 'transcendent' wisdom, a focus on the experience of grace is intended to lead to better understanding of the complex way religious experience emerged in deep time. The goal is to begin to discover more about the evolution of wisdom by investigating these patterns in their relationship to both humility and grace.

The endeavor brings together fourteen researchers from archeology, anthropology, and theology at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study in a university town in the Western Cape. A dominant thesis in evolutionary anthropology is that South Africa was part of a large region in which modern humans first evolved and lived, populating the landscape for hundreds of thousands of generations—and from which, against all odds, they migrated across the globe.

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Approach

The symposium is part of the John Templeton Foundation's *Humble Approach Initiative*. The goal of the initiative is to bring about the discovery of new spiritual information by furthering high-quality scientific research. The "humble approach" is inherently interdisciplinary, sensitive to nuance, and biased in favor of building linkages and connections. It assumes an openness to new ideas and a willingness to experiment. Placing high value upon patience and perseverance, it retains a sense of wondering expectation because it recognizes, in Loren Eiseley's haunting phrase, "a constant emergent novelty in nature that does not lie totally behind us, or we would not be where we are." A fundamental principle of the Foundation, in the words of its founder, is that "humility is a gateway to greater understanding and open[s] the doors to progress" in all endeavors. Sir John Templeton believed that in their quest to comprehend foundational realities, scientists, philosophers, and theologians have much to learn about and from one another. The humble approach is intended as a corrective to parochialism. It encourages discovery and seeks to accelerate its pace.

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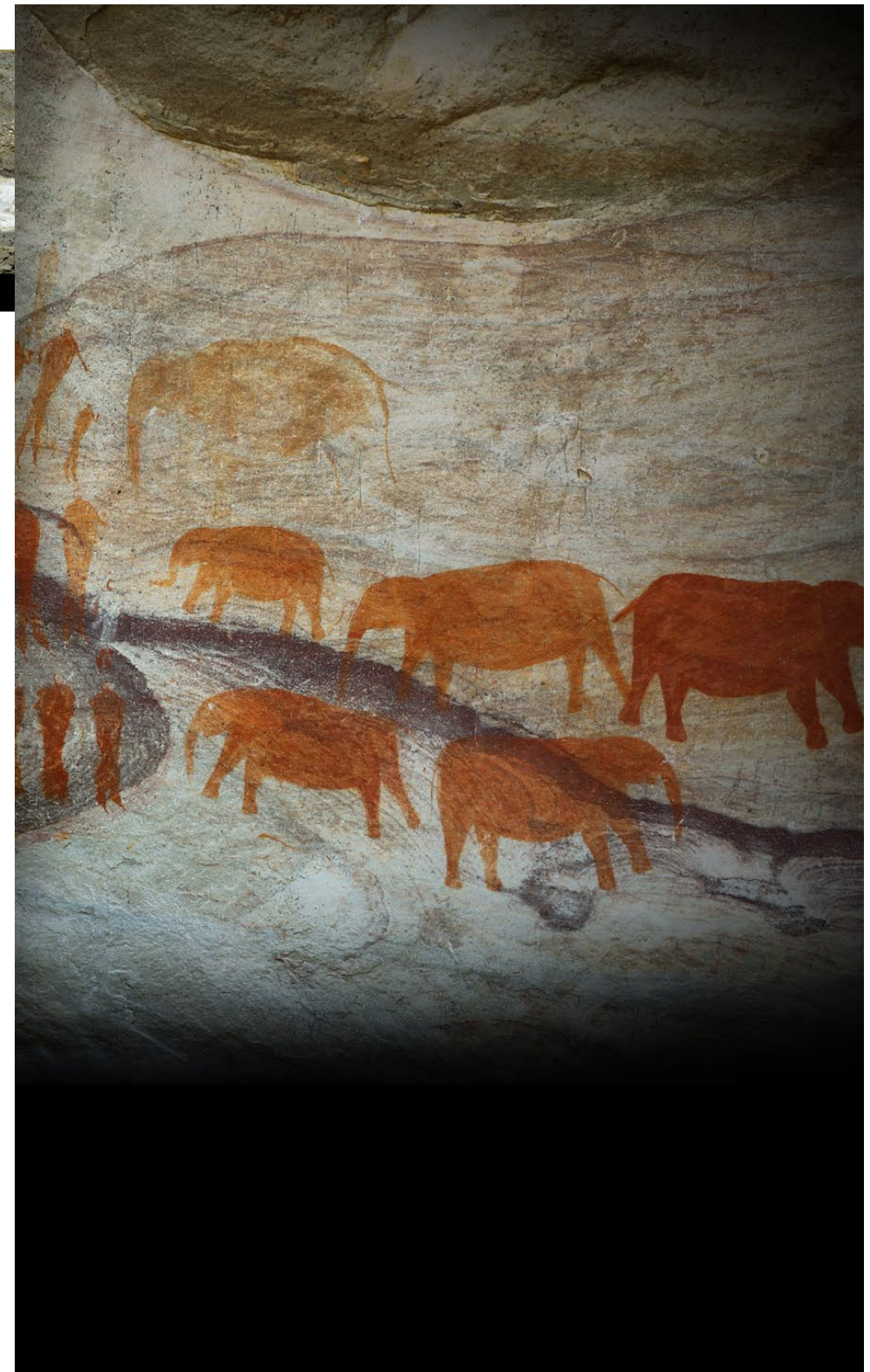
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Chairs

Celia Deane-Drummond

Agustín Fuentes

Celia Deane-Drummond is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame where she serves as the inaugural director of the Center for Theology, Science and Human Flourishing. Formerly professor of theology and the biosciences at the University of Chester, her distinguished contributions to the new discipline of “ecothology” reflect her early interest in botany and her later concentration on Christian theological studies. She also has written searchingly about the theological and ethical implications of new developments in genetics. Dr. Deane-Drummond did her first baccalaureate degree at Girton College, Cambridge, and took honors in natural sciences. She went on to earn a Ph.D. in plant physiology at Reading University in 1980 and to do post-doctoral research in botany, first at the University of British Columbia and then at Cambridge. Upon changing fields, she received a post-graduate diploma in Christian studies from Canada’s Regent College in 1983, a baccalaureate degree with honors in theology from Trinity College, Bristol, in 1989, and a Ph.D. in theological studies from the University of Manchester in 1992. Dr. Deane-Drummond began her teaching career as a lecturer in botany at Durham University. She became involved with theological education through her curricular design work with the International Consultancy for Religion, Education and Culture from 1991 to 1994 at the same time she was also a visiting lecturer in theological studies at the University of Manchester. She then joined the theology and religious studies faculty at the University of Chester where she was promoted to professor in 2000 and named the founding director of the Centre for Religion and the Biosciences two years later. She accepted her current position in 2011, and she currently serves as a fellow of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Eck Institute for Global Health, and John Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values. An elected honorary professor in theology and science at Durham, Dr. Deane-Drummond is chair of the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment, a founding fellow of the International Society for Science and Religion, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Commerce, and an honorary fellow of the Gladstone Library. She serves on the editorial boards of the Peter Lang book series *New International Studies in Applied Ethics* and the T&T Clark book series *Religion and the University*, as well as on the editorial boards of *Theology and Science* and *Zygon*. She is an editor of *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences* and a consulting editor of the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. As a consultant to the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, she helped to shape Church policy on environmental issues. The author of more than two hundred papers published in scientific and scholarly journals and in volumes of collected works, she is the editor or co-editor of nine books, most recently: (with David Clough and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser) *Animals as Religious Subjects: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (2013), (with Ernst Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, and Denis Edwards) *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons* (2014), and (with Sigurd Bergmann and Bronislaw Szerszynski) *Technofutures, Nature, and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, which was published last year by Ashgate. Dr. Deane-Drummond is also the author or co-author of seven other monographs, including *Creation through Wisdom* (2000), *Genetics and Christian Ethics* (2006), *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (2009), and a work on theological anthropology in the light of science, *The Wisdom of the Liminal: Evolution and Other Animals in Human Becoming*, which was published by Wm. B. Eerdmans in 2014. A new edited



work, (with Sigurd Bergmann and Markus Vogt) *Religion in the Anthropocene*, is in press at Wipf and Stock, and another, in preparation, (with Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser) *On Care for Our Common Home: Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines*, will be published by Bloomsbury. In addition, she has written ten books for general audiences.

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Chairs

Celia Deane-Drummond

Agustin Fuentes

Professor and chair of anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, **Agustin Fuentes** pursues research into the why and how of being human. His current foci include cooperation and bonding in human evolution, ethnoprimateology and multispecies anthropology, evolutionary theory, and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of human nature, as well as public perceptions of what it means to be human. Educated at the University of California, Berkeley, where he remained to take a Ph.D. in anthropology in 1994, Dr. Fuentes began his teaching career there as a lecturer in anthropology before moving on to Central Washington University as an assistant professor in 1996. He was appointed an associate professor in 2000, and two years later he joined the anthropology faculty at Notre Dame. Named Nancy O'Neill Associate Professor of Anthropology in 2005, he was promoted to a full professorship in 2008. He has served as director of the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at Notre Dame, and he is currently a fellow of Notre Dame's Liu Institute for Asian Studies, Institute for Latino Studies, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and John Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values. Dr. Fuentes is a winner of a number of university teaching and leadership awards. He serves as senior editor of the Routledge book series The New Biological Anthropology and on the editorial board of the Cambridge University Press series Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology, as well as an associate editor of *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences*, assistant editor of the *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, and on the editorial boards of *Anales de Antropologia* and *Iberis* and the *American Anthropologist*. The author of more than one hundred papers published in scientific journals or as chapters in volumes of collected works, he is the editor or co-editor of nine books, including, most recently, (with Jeremy MacClancy) *Ethics in the Field: Contemporary Challenges* (2013) and (with Darcia Narvaez, Kristin Valentino, James J. McKenna, and Peter Gray) *Ancestral Landscapes in Human Evolution: Culture, Childrearing and Social Wellbeing* (2014). Dr. Fuentes is also the author of the textbook, *Core Concepts in Biological Anthropology* (2006), which was updated in 2011 under the title *Biological Anthropology: Concepts and Connections*, as well as of four other books: *Evolution of Human Behavior* (2011), *Race, Monogamy and Other Lies They Told You* (2012), and (with Aku Visala) *Conversations on Human Nature*, a set of interviews with leading scholars and scientists that presents the basic scientific, philosophical, and theological issues involved in understanding human nature and was published by Left Coast/Routledge last year. Forthcoming in March from Dutton/Penguin is his latest book, *The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional*.

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