

## **At the table of multi-disciplinary conversations**

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More fundamental to and preceding the participation by Christian Theologians in a common task of sense making (see Conradie 1), is an understanding of Christian Theology's role as being a "conversation specialist" (Will Storrar) in the context of the science-religion / theology discourses and as being a "conversation partner" on the genesis of knowledge (that is, on models of rationality). As "conversation partner", Christian Theology must listen to the dialogue partners, participate in and engagingly contribute to the science of philosophy's discourses on models of rationality in formulating criteria for making knowledge claims. On these knowledge claims, Christian Theology has no monopoly. It can neither prematurely accept an (self-introduced) designation such as "a particular school of thought" (see Conradie 2 and 11) as vantage point nor prematurely introduce "revelational claims" (see Conradie 3 and 10) as immunisation strategy. Christian theologians indeed may be asked to explain what they bring to the table that is distinctive (see rightly so Conradie 4) for them as "conversation specialists". Let me formulate and substantiate my argument in response to Conradie only with specific reference to two issues. Firstly to the welcoming, seating and conversation at the table. This table Conradie (see 2) calls – in reference to Van Huyssteen – the table of multi-disciplinary conversations. And secondly Conradie's statement on the substantive contribution that Christian Theology can make in taking on the common

task of understanding the “whole revelation of God”. I restrict my response to these two issues.

1. To spontaneously choose within the exciting contemporary and wide-ranging philosophical discourses but one example: Paul Ricoeur’s specific understanding of an a-religious concept of revelation as welcoming address, and within the context of an understanding of creation (nature) as God’s “epistle to humanity”, it is clear that a concept of revelation is acknowledged as being constitutive for Christian theological reflection. How can it be re-imagined within science-theology discourses?
2. If it in its most simplified definition means “to uncover / to make known something which was previously unknown”, and in the context of Christian theology, “God’s self-revelation” then surely it implies some kind or form of knowledge claims.
3. If such theological knowledge claims wishes to maintain its identity without retreating to an esoteric world of private, insular knowledge claims, it should consciously seat itself at the interdisciplinary table of reflection on the genesis of knowledge.
4. At the interdisciplinary table of reflection on the genesis of knowledge, theological reflection will find a justification for its reservation at the table, as well as pointers for making knowledge claims. The *former*, namely a justification for its reservation at the table, is announced by evolutionary epistemology. The *latter*, namely the pointers, are to be formulated in the interdisciplinary space that creatively opens up in the dialogue with evolutionary epistemology.
5. Regarding the justification for its reservation at the table, evolutionary epistemology as a theory of cognition, reveals the biological roots of all human rationality, and thus the shared resources of human rationality for both scientific and theological reflection. It subsequently opens space for an interdisciplinary account of our epistemic activities, and facilitates a post-foundationalist notion (Van Huyssteen) of rationality (that is, it takes us beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries).

6. Regarding the formulation of pointers, theological reflection is made aware not only of being shaped by its cultural, social, historical contexts, but also by the biological roots of human rationality. However, theological reflection as cultural achievement, so intimately entwined with the process of biological evolution, is ultimately not determined by it. In the words of Keith Ward: it is designed to lead to levels of explanation and reality beyond itself.
7. If our genes do not completely determine our culture and our rational abilities, then it may be reasonable to expect that our genes, our culture, and our rational abilities may also not completely determine the enduring and persuasive need for metaphysics, and ultimately for life transforming religious faith. This awareness enables theological reflection to move beyond so called narrow options of either / or, that is for example of naturalism and supernaturalism.
8. This movement beyond so called narrow options is prompted by the shared focal interest (of scientific and theological reflection) on life processes, but is also interested in more since it is concerned with the interpretation of existence. In “more”, since nature is not designed to answer all the metaphysical questions.
9. Regarding the “more”, that is, the interpretation of existence, evolutionary epistemology tells us that some kind of metaphysics seems to be a general characteristic of all humans, and subsequently of the naturalness of religion, and of belief.
10. In religious belief we find a drive toward something transcending human powers as reflected in the fabric of the universe, a drive toward a reality greater that transcends empirical reality.
11. One of the theological lines which I consider to be fruitful to pursue for the interdisciplinary conversation is amongst others Ricoeur’s focus on the poetic dimension of language (that is, the conjunction of mythos and mimesis), and the category of testimony which addresses our imagination.
12. The historical-poetical “Testament” (that is, Scripture and nature) can subsequently be re-imagined as an emerging “one book” (albeit differentiated with regard to “information”) in the on-going

process of evolution in which our ability for rational knowledge and humanity's endless quest for ultimate meaning finds an existential village. Conradie (see 5-7) employs in this regard the formulation in a Christian context – with which I wholeheartedly agree – of the “social reconstruction of ultimate reality” from clues provided by the biblical documents on the historical-theological origin of Christianity and the social-ethical implications that interpretatively flow from these commitments (see Conradie 12).

13. Being “told” what God is like, can thus unfold in very different (dazzling) manners: within life experiences and testimonies thereto, life processes, nature and its mind-boggling evolutionary history in all its diversity and fascinating readings.
14. Such a re-imagining of revelation is in my opinion not only to be understood as celebrating the mystery of the “revealed God”, but also as an acknowledgment in a credible manner of the depth, width and height of that very mystery that sustains humanity as *imago Dei*.