

New



James C. Peterson

PSCF is always looking for the best essays to serve our readers. Maybe you have one in mind. As was described in the December editorial, we seek, first of all, writing that fits our purpose. *PSCF* publishes articles that contribute to the scholarly discussion of how the Christian faith interacts with the sciences. There are already hundreds of years of interplay between the sciences and Christian faith, but there is much more ahead. Studying the areas in which they challenge or offer insight for each other is fruitful and important. As a peer-reviewed journal in that pursuit, we are looking for contributions that are new, arguably true, of interest to our readers, and well communicated. I will devote future editorials to each of these essential characteristics. Here I will focus on the key standard of making a contribution that is new.

What is new in the essay is not necessarily the core idea addressed in an article. It may be an explanation of a new argument in support of a perspective, or the highlighting of a neglected argument that undermines it. Or it could be a new way of expressing an idea that then reaches an audience that did not grasp it as well before. Or perhaps it is a new application of an idea already gathering currency from argument elsewhere. The contribution can be at many points, but there is a new contribution.

Of course, simply being new is not enough for publication. Peer reviewers will not always agree on the merits of a particular article, but the articles that are published will have obtained substantial consensus that something new is offered and that it is compelling enough to warrant consideration. When differing views with substantial merit come to the fore, the journal will provide space for those views to make their case. Sometimes contrary articles will appear next to each other, and sometimes they will appear in subsequent issues as the discussion develops. While each article contributes, it is

not expected that any one will be the final definitive statement.

Most new ideas do not pop into existence as a form of spontaneous generation. A new contribution is rarely an isolated one. It usually comes from an ongoing dialogue that can benefit from an insightful turn. These new perspectives and ideas can come from people just beginning to study a field, but it takes time and diligent study for them to know that they have found such a contribution. The student paper that earns praise for its exploration of a subject area new to the student, is probably not a groundbreaking study for experts in the field. It takes time and labor to master a field well enough to know that what is an insight to the author will be an insight to those who have reflected on the field for a major portion of their lives. That is a high, but attainable, bar. It is reached by the authors in every issue of *PSCF*. The articles show in their discussion and citations that the authors have taken into account the byways already tried on their topic, and so are offering a new step for consideration. To that end it is helpful that prospective authors have their work checked by colleagues with applicable expertise before the essay is offered to the journal. Blind peer review at the journal then tests the proposed article further. This vetting process is an investment of editorial time to guard the reader's time. It indicates to the reader that the argument is one worthy of attention.

Ecclesiastes despairs that there is nothing new under the sun. Actually, this journal exists because there is always more to learn. There can be recurring questions and themes, but each new article brings forward some aspect worthy of consideration that was not part of the literature before. That is the case with this issue; it adds to our thinking about the contribution and limitations of what we can accomplish in our scientific pursuits. ✠



In This Issue

James K. A. Smith argues that science is always pursued by humans from a cultural perspective because anything human beings do is from a cultural perspective. This reminds us that our science pursuits can become entangled with false beliefs. What is claimed as a finding of science is not automatically a trump card.

In the next article, Robert Bishop describes, in an incisive history, the telling example of materialism creeping into the scientific endeavor. For Bishop, the *methodological* naturalism of the long-practiced scientific method should be quite distinct from the *metaphysical* naturalism that some have claimed rather vociferously of late. Confusing science with a metaphysical claim against God's reality and presence is an accretion of a materialist culture. Such is not entailed by scientific method properly understood and carried out.

In the following article, René van Woudenberg specifically delineates some of the limits to what science can describe. A great strength of the scientific method is in recognizing what it does not achieve,

as well as what it does. Science does not investigate or represent all that we know. Science is good at what it does, but due humility and accuracy require that we also recognize what it does not do.

In that honest context, Kathryn Applegate has found methodological naturalism to be an effective tool to understand much of God's creation. Applegate advocates that practicing science from the perspective of methodological naturalism, properly understood, is not anti-God, as some have charged. She appreciates as well that methodological naturalism offers a culture of cooperation and correction that helps people to work together across cultural divides.

Walter Bradley then gives us an example of directing the powerful tools of science and engineering to the service of the poor—a sterling use.

As always, ongoing discussion is crucial for potential insight and correction. In letters to the editor, Edwin Yamauchi and Kenell Touryan suggest an earlier date for the birth of Jesus than the one advocated by James Nollet in our December issue. Those letters are preceded by the always appreciated review of the latest books.

James C. Peterson, *Editor*

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Reviewers in 2012

We wish to thank the following scholars for their crucial service in anonymous peer review.

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