



## Module

# Neuroscience & Theological Anthropology

Science Module for existing university or seminary level courses.

Drop in to a course syllabus (with modifications) in

Philosophy: Mind/Brain Problem

Religious Studies

Metaphysics: Epistemology

Pastoral Care

Systematic Theology: Anthropology

1 week's assignment for 3 hours of class meeting

### NEUROSCIENCE & THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This unit clarifies a misleading impression growing in the cognitive sciences as a byproduct to recent advances in neuroscience. The byproduct is a tendency to reduce conscious operations to preconscious or subconscious determinants. Director of the Cognitive Neuroimaging Unit in Saclay, France, Stanislas Dehaene, for example, startles us by declaring that in everyday activity we fail to realize just how much of our activity is guided by "an unconscious automatic pilot...We constantly overestimate the power of our consciousness in making decisions--but, in truth, our capacity for conscious control is limited" (Dehaene, 2014, 47). It is true, to be sure, that our neurocircuitry is responsible for this automatic pilot, but we need not jump to the unwarranted conclusion that this automaticity is exhaustively responsible for every cognitive process. It is premature to

overemphasize the brain's automatic pilot, allowing the higher levels of consciousness to drift to the margins if not off stage. It is more accurate to say: human cognition relies on our automatic pilot to clear a mental workspace wherein symbolic discourse and abstract reasoning can engage in activity the brain could not, by itself, have thought of.

This discussion within neuroscience and cognitional theory has implications for tenets within theological anthropology such as free will, the relation of the body to the soul, and resurrection of the body.

### DLO (Desired Learning Outcomes)

Added to the set of DLOs for the entire course. The student should also demonstrate...

1. knowledge of deterministic claims associated with neuroscience;
2. ability to describe issues at stake;
3. awareness of theological commitments regarding body and soul.

### REQUIRED READING

RCRS: *The Routledge Companion to Religion and*

*Science*, eds., James W. Haag, Gregory R. Peterson, and Michael L. Spezio. London: Routledge, 2012. ISBN 978-0-415-49244-7 (hbk) or 978-0-203-80351-6 (ebk).

**This comprehensive volume is valuable for almost all modules.**

RCRS 26 Michael L. Spezio, "The Cognitive Sciences and Religious Experience"

RCRS 27 Richard K. Payne, "Cognitive Science and Classical Buddhist Philosophy of Mind"

Peters, Ted, "Models of the Soul: Comparing Concepts,"

[http://tedstimelytake.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/models\\_of\\_the\\_soul.pdf](http://tedstimelytake.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/models_of_the_soul.pdf) .

Weissenbacher, Alan C., "Ten Principles for Interpreting Neuroscientific Pronouncements

Regarding Human Nature," *Dialog* 54:1 (Spring 2015) 41-51.

### RECOMMENDED READING

Deacon, Terrence W., 2012. *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Dehaene, Stanislas, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes Our Thoughts*. New York: Viking, 2014.

RCRS 29 Stephen, Kaplan, "Hinduism and the Cognitive Sciences"

Murphy, Nancey, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies*. Cambridge UK:

Cambridge University Press, 2006. ISBN 978-0-521-67676-2 pb.

OHN = *On Human Nature*, eds., Michel Tibayrenc and Francisco J. Ayala.  
Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2017. ISBN 978-0-12-420190-3.

**This comprehensive volume is valuable for Science classes.**

OHN 8 T.M. Preuss, "The Human Brain: Evolution and Distinctive Features"

OHN 14 S.N. Austad and C.E. Finch, "Human Life History Evolution: New Perspectives on Body and Brain Growth"

OHN 20 S. Hameroff, "The Quantum Origin of Life: How the Brain Evolved to Feel Good"

OHN 21 M. Reimers and B. Oakley, "Empathy, Theory of Mind, Cognition, Morality, and Altruism"

OHN 32 T.W. Deacon, "Human Variability and the Origins and Evolution of Language"

OHN 34 R. McDermott, "Culture, Brain, and Behavior: The Implications of Neural Plasticity and Development on Social Contexts and Political Structures"

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CTNS Website: [ctns.org](http://ctns.org)

Ted Peters' Website: [TedsTimelyTake.com](http://TedsTimelyTake.com)

Biologos: <http://biologos.org/blogs/chris-stump-equipping-educators/series/this-week-in-creation>