

WONDER AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Indiana University Consortium for the Study of Religion, Ethics, and Society
Deadline for proposal submission: September 1, 2014

CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Aristotle famously observed that philosophy originates in wonder. Descartes considered wonder the first of all the passions, a “sudden surprise of the soul” that moves the mind toward understanding and away from ignorance. Others have derided wonder as a defective state, a stunned response that impedes rather than facilitates the acquisition of knowledge. Wonder is the province of the wide-eyed child at play in the woods, and the wild-eyed scientist at work in the lab. Scientific forms of wonder beckon us into mystery but may also banish the mysterious and drain away its power. Wonder at nature is prompted by the odd and uncanny, the strange and novel, the transcendent and sublime, as well as encounters with the monstrous and horrific. Wonder has variously been associated with, or dissociated from, curiosity, awe, intimations of divinity, infinity, the sublime, the miraculous or supernatural, feelings of astonishment and puzzlement. Its virtuous dimensions are said to shade into generosity, humility, and compassion, while its shadow side suggests the lure of unwholesome enchantments and hubristic trespass into forbidden knowledge. Wonder can engender moral caution and respect for otherness—what R.W. Hepburn calls the “concern not to blunder into a damaging manipulation of another”—but it may also foster the will to mastery and domination. Wonder has also played a key role in the environmental movement since its inception. The 50th anniversary in 2015 of Rachel Carson’s work *The Sense of Wonder* provides an occasion to reflect on wonder’s ongoing significance for human encounters with and perceptions of the natural.

This Call for Proposals for “Wonder and the Natural World” is the first phase of a two-year thematic initiative sponsored by the Indiana University Consortium for the Study of Religion, Ethics, and Society. The first phase is open to faculty at all IU campuses and culminates in a daylong symposium in May 2015 wherein funding recipients, along with invited guests, will present their works-in-progress. The second phase will be open to national/international scholars and culminates in a two-day national conference in May 2016 that includes IU faculty recipients of research funding in the first funding cycle.

We welcome proposals that explore the intersection of wonder—or its cognate terms—with a diverse set of themes that range across the disciplines. These include but are not limited to the following:

multi-faith perspectives on nature and greening religion; contested meanings of nature and the divine; secular reenchantment and religious naturalism; natural patterning, design, regularity; natural and divine law; natural theology

political power and charisma in relation to environmental mobilization; environmental/social justice and activism; regulation of and political/legal constraints on the wondrous

the apocalyptic imagination; environmental catastrophe, natural disaster, or natural evil; war and nature; shock and awe

the legacy of Rachel Carson's *Sense of Wonder*; children's nature spirituality, nature-deficit disorder, or nature-study

outdoor recreation, education, theme parks; ecotourism; landscape geography, architecture, and art; sacred geographies; artificial, recreated, or restored environments

cinematic or fictional representations of nature/the natural; science fiction, interactive or virtual worlds, gaming

bioethical decision making vis-à-vis the natural; natural healing and health; natural limits or forbidden knowledge; trans- or posthumanism

the human/nonhuman boundary; boundary-crossing and shapeshifting; embodiment, animality, and sensuous experience

the technological sublime; technological interventions (genetic engineering, synthetic biology, geoengineering)

adaptive, innate, or evolved responses to the natural world (evo-/eco-psychology, biophilia)

historical, cross-cultural, or interdisciplinary approaches to/appropriations of awe and wonder

Eligibility and funding: Research funds are available for full-time, tenure-line IU faculty. Funding of up to \$5,000 is available for individuals and up to \$10,000 is available for teams. Funds can be used for travel, research materials, research assistance, or salary. We particularly welcome proposals that cut across disciplines, units, or campuses.

Proposals and supporting documents: Proposals should clearly relate the proposed project to the announced theme, specify the sources or methodology (where relevant) upon which the project will be based, and outline the scholarly contribution of the project in language accessible to a wide range of scholars. Proposals should include a project description (1000 words), budget (if funding will be used for anything other than a salary supplement), and the curricula vitae of applicants.

Deadlines and timeline: Submission deadline is September 1, 2014. Acceptance of proposals will be announced at the end of October 2014. Grant recipients will present their preliminary findings/works-in-progress at a daylong symposium in May 2015, at IU Bloomington.

Proposals may be emailed to Abby Gitlitz: agitlitz@indiana.edu. For additional information, please contact CSRES Director Lisa Sideris: lsideris@indiana.edu.