

Paper Title: Metanexus Courses Online for the World-Ethical Issues
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Abstract:

A global electronic university system is coming into existence before our eyes. It is linking all online distance education courses as well as the virtual 'open' universities that now reach tens of millions of learners and online library resources. At <http://ecolecon.missouri.edu/globalresearch/index.html> is my three volume online book about the future of global lifelong online education and research. J. F. Rischard of the World Bank in HIGH NOON: 20 GLOBAL CRISES AND 20 YEARS TO SOLVE THEM shows how to use Internet networking to find solutions and build political support for projects **to provide everyone on the planet with food, safe water, health care, essential education and economic justice**. Science and religion can agree to deal with such basic human problems; for example through offering online courses to individual learners, and also as a resource for faculty; with a free-to-the world electronic textbook with embedded tutor and automatic language translation. Looking to forthcoming technology, music and other arts to *empower essential vision, motivation, compassion and political action*.

Biography:

G. Parker Rossman is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma (education and communications), the University of Chicago (thesis on the sociology of the university), and Yale University (Ph.D. in higher education). Rossman's current research interest is "the nature and future of the university," and its design as a global learning system for all ages and cultures. He was executive consultant to and the founding vice-president of the Global University project--which conducts global classroom demonstrations to test distance education technologies--of GLOSAS/USA (global systems analysis and simulation). In that capacity and as a member of the board of directors of the University of the World (which had councils in twenty-six countries to bring business, government and higher education together to plan for the future of electronic higher education), he pressed these organizations to focus more on research to solve fundamental human problems. He has been a member of the Columbia University faculty seminar on "computers and society" and is on the board of the journal *Innovate*, which deals with cutting-edge issues in education. He has taught at Yale, Central Philippines University, Balamand University in Lebanon, and University of Chicago, and has lectured at the Indian Institute of World Culture in Bangalore, University of Cambridge, and the Classical University of Lisbon. He has written a series of books to challenge education in several professions, including *After Punishment What?; Hospice: New Models of Care for the Terminally Ill; Family Survival*; and *Computers: Bridges to the Future*. He has presented papers at the World Brain Conference at the University of Calgary in 1997 and at the Global Brain Workshop at the Free University of Brussels in 2001. An article on

management of all knowledge is in the April/May 2004 issue of the *Futurist* and a sequel in the January 2005 issue, on how electronic textbooks can be cheaply provided to the world's poor.

Paper Text:

I begin with the assumption that a global electronic university system is coming into existence before our eyes. It begins by linking all the higher education institutions that offer online distance education courses as well as the virtual 'open universities. This includes tens of millions of learners in China, Indonesia, India' and for example the British Open University that has over 50,000 students in Russia. So far there is no global plan or system; just a 'kludge' of courses. That raises ethical issues for science and religion.

*In that context, perhaps the most difficult ethical issues in both science and religion are establishing just priorities; for example humanity is living in an age when terribly unethical and immoral things are being done to women and children, and few in science and religion act when hundreds of thousands are butchered in Rwanda; when rebels deliberately cut off the arms of children, even babies in Sierra Leone; when huge numbers of women and children are raped and killed in the Sudan; when children are drafted into armies where they are enslaved with drugs; when uncountable numbers are entrapped into prostitution; and millions into cruel child labor. **Surely disagreement between science and religion should not be allowed to limit effective action in a world of crisis.***

In these contexts of opportunity and crisis, I suggest that Metanexus – perhaps an online Metanexus Academy if one becomes necessary—should experiment with online courses. These courses should be offered and made available to individual learners, but also to colleges and universities that do not otherwise offer such courses, or as a resource for faculty to improve the quality of courses they offer.

Metanexus, however, *must beware of just copying classroom courses without taking account of forthcoming new technologies that are going to transform lifelong education.*

WHAT COURSES?

To avoid some bad experiences of others *I suggest a series of experiments that need not cost much*, and that can gradually discover and move to what best serves science-religion dialogue. In any case, I suggest that Metanexus begin to find or create the following courses, *experimenting with some of the technologies discussed below:*

--(1) **Creating new content for an online course can be every expensive.** So a first experiment might be to videotape an existing course that might be offered on local TV. (I suspect that my town's public access TV channel would use it if without charge to test it out.) See some possibilities under 'technology' below.

--(2) A first experiment might be an online lecture course that mostly would make available selected lectures from Metanexus and Templeton foundation conferences.

--(3)--Another experiment could be to offer online an already existing classroom course that some teacher would make available for a non-credit experiment. Perhaps soon several could be made available. In any case the use of existing courses would save the money and time required for a newly created course. . The model might be MIT courses now being put online, free to anyone in the world. (Is one of them a religion course which involves some dialog with science? If not, how could that be enabled”)

---(4) If funding could be obtained, an ideal experiment would be to create a *series of 'modules'* that faculty might use to **supplement existing courses in science or religion**. S Combinations of modules could create some first excellent team-created Metanexus online courses:

(a) a module on science-religion dialog for use in existing religion courses, and in some introduction to science courses., with an emphasis on resources available online.

-- (b) one for graduate students in science or in religion, on needed research and how to do it, again linking to all kinds of online resources.

--(c) one for continuing education, addressed to the increasing number of online discussion groups, such as those on inter-religious dialog and understanding, bringing in science as a neutral place to find some initial common ground.

--(d) one a first course for undergraduates. (A recommended term is 'collegiates,' a term that recognizes that the best education is a partnership with teachers, and that entering higher education learners are of all ages now.)

--(5) Most useful, I suggest, would be **courses that consist of online electronic textbooks**, such as the excellent ones available in medicine and for American school children in some states and that soon can be outstandingly better and available to the world.

ELECTRONIC TEXTBOOKS.

I suggest that Metanexus courses be offered in the form of **free online electronic textbooks** that can be used by isolated individual learners, or with classes. They can soon include *automated tutors* for different ages, languages and education levels. **Free to the world?** Such online course regularly-updated textbooks—that contain all a learner needs—can be sold on line – perhaps even by Amazon or Barnes and Noble--for example, and **then when 'second hand,' last year's not-yet-updated copy can be offered free to people in developing world and to poor people anywhere** who apply for scholarship aid. This can be a cheap and very effective form of 'foreign aid.'

Physicist Bork has developed automated tutors and has made experimental use of them. For his books and a description of the research, theory and practice, including automated translation, see his chapter:

<http://ecolecon.missouri.edu/globalresearch/chapters/3-09.html>.> This is a chapter in a three volume online electronic book—inadequate tentative draft-- that has been used in over twenty countries by individuals and for courses and is currently being translated in China. For an electronic online text book developed at MIT. (See CITY OF BITS.) It no longer exists because it invited users too make changes and it got too large to continue.

For more research and explanation of electronic textbooks see FUTURIST magazine, February 2005 and <<http://ecolecon.missouri.edu/globalresearch/chapters/3-07.html>>

These electronic online textbooks can include web page links to online digital libraries, reference book resources, such as those Google is digitalizing (all the books in several major university libraries, limited now to those publications no longer covered by copyright.) On emerging global electronic libraries see <<http://ecolecon.missouri.edu/globalresearch/chapters/2-07.html>> and the FUTURIST, June 2004 on 'cosmopedia,' the inter-linking of digitalized encyclopedias and reference books that are available on line. A start was made on CD's.. For example SCM Press in London's THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY: AN INTRODUCTION WITH CD-ROM was fully-searchable, had note-taking and highlighting that can be stored for reference. It had links to biblical texts and a wide range of other links and maps and illustrations as well as online access to photographs and ancient documents. And much more is available on line now that soon can be cross-indexed on topics where religion and science interface.

TECHNOLOGIES TO USE.

Depending on what is financially possible, the Metanexus courses could be made available with a variety of different technologies (some making courses available to the poor in the developing world. Note the May, 2005, UN-World Bank conference.).

--(1) The 'Humanity CD-Rom Project,' based in Belgium has offered disks, costing one dollar, that can be played on a five dollar music CD player, with earphones, that a farmer can listen to while plowing a field."

--(2) Such a course can also be offered on community radio, or on TV as to tens of thousands of factory workers in China. Cheap VCR tapes of lectures and lab demonstrations can also be offered . (While not online, the 'Great Courses' of 'The Teaching Company' < <http://www.TEACH-12.com>> suggest a way to offer courses on local education TV stations and via satellite TV. Perhaps a experiment without cost could be such a taped course, similar to those they now offer on 'The Joys of Science' and 'Great World Religions.'" (Would the 'Teaching Company' be interested?)

--(3) **But I recommend the Internet.** For example, the province of New Brunswick in Canada extended fiber optic cable to every school and library so that the entire workforce of the province could get continuing education for a rapidly changing economy where everyone needs new skills. Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world is in 2005 extending cable to every school in the country, so that every neighborhood school can be a learning resource center for all ages and needs. Increasingly every university in Africa has access to the Africa Virtual University and to 'telecenters ' and neighborhood schools that can serve all ages..

It is important that plans NOT be limited to technology now available but begin now to plan how use technologies that will available in the near future. For example, Thieme (2005) points out that in the emerging digital age, multi-player online gaming communities like Everquest--with hundreds of thousands of participants at once "begin to deal with spiritual issues and quest". These appeal to the young digital

generation, including some for religious education. . Electronic courses can actively involve participants. That points to other technologies that are beginning to come together to transform education and empower a global electronic learning system.

LIBRARY RESOURCES?

The emerging worldwide digital library enlarges available resources for science-religion study: <<http://ecolecon.missouri.edu/globalresearch/chapters/1-05.html>> Resources of all the world's religions are included. For instance, the Muslim encyclopedia is online, as is the entire corpus of Jewish legal tradition. Nearly all ancient religious manuscripts and scriptures are cross-indexed for instant search. The *Religion Index* is online with the reviews of books on religion, journal articles, all significant religious encyclopedias, current indexing of all papal writings by date and subject and abstracts of biblical scholarship. but who will use this now for larger-scale research? Electronic forms of ancient scriptures are coming into existence, some with graphic art and motion picture illustrations. but wouldn't it be interesting for a global transdisciplinary team to play around with the idea of 21st century `scriptures' that would not only add graphics to text, but that would, for example, add text to films that report on real acts of compassion, stories of self-giving in service of human need, and visual metaphors and stories that would illustrate and explain complicated social and personal problems?

Much religious art and music of all cultures are also available in digital form. It can enlarge human spiritual imagination and experience, using **contemporary art forms to nurture vision, compassion and motivation**. Artists could now use the increasingly powerful computers that are to come together with television and satellites to create artistic experiences that span time and space. Teams of artists in different countries can interconnect to blend sight, sound, color and movement into global art forms. *These can seek to recapture a unifying vision of life that art and religion have lacked since the middle Ages.*

Online courses can use powerful new musical technologies, such as keyboards that can be used to create the sound of a hundred symphony orchestras. Can new combinations of music, art and `streaming video bring alive history of religion and science and create experiences which motivate and enlarge visions so that religion and science studies for **much more than scientific formulas and religious traditions, doctrines and a comparison of religious ideas, theories and practices.**

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

I would hope that first experimental Metanexus courses would strive to use emerging technology that can enable a tailored, different learning program for each enrollee, assuming a partnership with learners in which the instructor is more of a coach and counselor. If there are lectures let them be on videotape, or streaming video, where a learner can replay and replay until the subject is mastered. . Maybe many scholars do not see it yet, but they **will soon have powerful tools to use for projects that never before have been possible**. Only small changes have been possible so far. But `permanent tectonic shifts,' transformations and a `tidal wave of change' is on the way.

Yet many online teachers see information technology as merely enabling them to do what they have been doing anyway, as if adding more power to a railroad locomotive

could make it blast off into space. They miss *grander goals*, according to the director of the Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory at the University of Maryland, College Park. For example, *cross-indexed digital data bases in areas like morals and ethics could be linked to contemporary crises*. In that way, tradition in morals and ethics can become more useful and helpful if study is enlarged to be a comprehensive global human tradition of all enlarging wisdom.

SOME GOALS FOR EXPERIMENTAL COURSES

--(a) In relation to religious extremism, terrorist and hate movements--that are becoming a potent and often dangerous political force in the world--religion and science have essential roles in helping all people understand each other and dialog on crises, seeing their common concerns as a first step towards resolving their antagonisms.

--(b) Can both religion and science seek to deepen human motivation, ethics, creative imagination, and the nurturing of values such as caring and compassion as central concerns in science-religion dialogue on both scientific and religious issues. For example, the way religious and scientific traditions can better help reverse the ecological perils facing the planet and to enlarge the vision, faith and will to act decisively.

--(c) To involve religious and scientific decision makers in a global quest for those common values that various religions already share and that respect and appreciate diversity of cultures, and I add, a **quest for enlarged vision**.

--(d) Grogert (1999), in the Internet Society's journal, pointed out that "the power of the Internet is in its human connective potential." He said that "the Internet has the potential for creating an education of hope" in a context of "two way and mutually respectful interaction. The expanding religion-science dialog has been scattered, however, and has not yet been systematic or involving enough disciplines. Dialog needs also to involve the humanities, arts, law, political science and more. Then it can examine more thoroughly the cultural and other **forces which numb moral vision and ethical creativity**, those that weaken the social responsibility of religious institutions **and that encourage simplistic and dogmatic thinking**.

--(e) Computer specialist Minsky of MIT has said of philosophy **that it is not dealing with powerful enough ideas**. Can the same be said of religion where many scholars who believe in a God--who created the entire universe--themselves deal with rather small designs, *petty research projects that hardly seem worthy of a Creator of 180 billion suns*. From a Judeo-Christian perspective, God has through information technology given scholars new powers--if they collaborate--that none can exercise alone. Some Judeo-Christian scholars might suggest that if God gave human beings the power to be co-creators, and if God--at work in all things--is at work in information age technology and all science, then one might agree with the philosopher Berdyaev who said that in his view God wishes to bring creativity into human lives..

RESEARCH COURSES?

In nearly every global crisis--even where what must be done is scientifically founded--*government officials, political leaders and the supporting public seem not to have a powerful enough vision, hope and motivation to do what must be done. **Is there a way that science-religion dialog might discover, develop or empower essential vision, motivation and compassion?*** With explosion of knowledge is hard to **take a holistic view of human life and the universe** to discuss human issues like hunger and health care rather than focusing on theological and scientific differences.

<<http://www.wnrf.org/search.htm#anchor2023119>>

Religion researchers, as most scholars in the humanities, do not have a tradition of team research. Few seem to have a vision of reintegrating the fragmented research in their own discipline, much less with others. That could change now as individual researchers and teams create their own Web pages with hyperlinks to a vast network of data bases and research. Such landscapes, Levy says, will be mapped in cyberspace with "dynamic diagrams and ideograms, moving architectures of images. . . deplorable and interactive." Such a holistic knowledge (and wisdom?) map can become a 'blueprint' for larger research strategies, initiating *a process similar to the construction of a Gothic cathedral by builders who would never see the outcome of centuries of work. **Similarly, the result of collective teamwork might succeed--will it take a century?--in transforming hate into compassion, violence into caring and empower necessary motivation.*** Communities of faith and science should take such a leap now, underaking *the task of **changing all the racist, warlike, dominating powers and evil institutions of human society.***

Who else will do it?

ETHIC SUBSTANCE OF THE GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

The Huddleston report argued that "***we cannot survive the 21st century with the ethics of the 20th century.***" What kind of morality, for example, currently allows so many millions of children to die unnecessarily of hunger when there is plenty of food? Shouldn't this underlie the agenda of a science-religion dialogue? Where is a global ethics going to come from? A more crucial question: is: **how can it become persuasive enough for every scientist and everyone else to act morally and ethically?**

In April 2005 I have made some forum presentations on motivational 'dreams and visions,' asking what it would take to excite current students to act as so many students did in the communist movements in the 1930's and the civil rights movement in the 1960's.

The *world's religions need to 'get their own house in order' so that they can help provide the vision, the compassion and the sense of responsibility that the public needs so that* (Rischarad 2002) religious organizations can help humanity cope with crises.' I quoted Arun Gandhi: "There can't be one code of values for America and another for the rest of the world." A courageous nun points out that 'pro-life anti-abortionists' really do not have a pro-life policy, only a pro-birth policy; because a really ethical pro-life policy would, for example give a high priority also to babies after they are born, whose brains do not develop adequately from a lack of the right food.

How is more effective moral and ethical education to be accomplished? Is humanity doomed to continue the same low-level of ethical behavior now often seen in universities as well as in callous bribery and graft in business and government, genocide, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, and corruption in education such as bureaucracies that divert and rob school funds, and other careless characteristics of a *morally immature* global society?

Saloman (2002) saw that expertise in the field of learning is limited mainly to 'the scholarly,' particularly "to the acquisition of facts, concepts, formulae and organized bodies of knowledge. So despite all the 'intellectual stuff' people know, humans fail so often to do what we know we ought to do and "we know far less about acquiring human values and learning to live by them." This is painfully illustrated in human failures in accomplishing peace and peaceful ways of resolving conflicts.

Must it not be true in science-religion dialogue what Meyer (2003) points out that in the coming global economy, **the key issues will be ethical; for example** Miller (2003) has asserted ecological issues are moral and ethical. Ridder (1995) suggested that *it is getting much harder to be ethical because humanity faces entirely new issues and much tougher choices*. This is one reason, he said, why so many people are "dropping out" and are **not making responsible decisions at all**. Then there is sloth! Many people say: "Won't we always have war, immoral political leaders, poverty and famine?" Must we also accept as inevitable the alliances between organized crime, political leaders and 'global terrorist civil war *that limit possibilities of providing education for all?* At the time of the bloody French and Russian revolutions the majority of miserable people rebelled against the small majority that owned all the wealth. Is humanity moving towards a similar situation as a small percent of the world's people, and a few rich nations, own most of the world's wealth and "the disenfranchised see nor chance? This is not just a moral and ethical issue, it is a moral crisis.

The French philosopher Michel Serres urges "*wresting ethics away from the specialists" who break knowledge up into little pieces. He called for a total approach "one that makes law, science, religion, mythology, mathematics, ethics and the humanities think in concert...especially about evil.*" After the burning alive of little children in Hiroshima he wanted "perspectives on the relationship between science and evil. Global morality and ethics **requires "large-scale, big picture, long range thinking.** . . as metaphoric, sensuous, dense, pliant, attentive and detailed as the small, loving thoughts we extend to objects and people we most dearly love."

Whether in science, in religion, in transdisciplinary dialog, scholars, or wherever anyone seeks to cope with moral, ethical and motivational questions, **can research continued to be limited to printed texts?** In religion-science dialogue the scholar is confronted with ideas and problems that are dancing around as images in our new knowledge space. Can what now appears as confusion become a new and more manageable way to cope with complexity? All knowledge, wisdom, tradition, data and experience can come together in a digital electronic cosmopedia. Powerful images, graphics, and 'knowledge maps' can link every human problem and issue with moral questions and sources.

<<http://www.uia.be>>

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