

# Grace & the Synaptic Self

## STPS 4284 – Fall 2006

Instructors: Alejandro Garcia-Rivera (JSTB)  
Contact: agarcia@jstb.edu or (510) 549-5020  
Office:

Mark Graves (GTU/CTNS)  
Contact: mark\_graves@comcast.net or (510) 525-1457 (home)

Location: CDSP: B  
Time: Tuesdays, 2:10-5:00

### Course Description

The traditional theological study of the relationship between nature and grace becomes transformed when the category of nature falls under the natural sciences. Cognitive neuroscience (the study of mind and brain) and genetics provide a structure in which to explore the human person as a relational self. Theology of grace explores the experiences and destiny of the human person in relation to God's free gift. This course will look at the tradition from the perspectives of the biological sciences to locate a new theological category that can truly interlace the understanding of grace with the data of the natural sciences: creativity. Creativity within the embodied person combines one's environmental constraints with novel possibility in decision-making to create a beautiful life. This course will satisfy as one of the requirements for the systematic theology component of the MDiv degree for JSTB students.

### Course Requirements

1. **Readings and class participation.**
2. **Research paper.** A research paper is due by 5pm on Tuesday, Dec 12. The paper should be 15 pages double-spaced in *Turabian* or *Chicago Manual of Style*. Students are encouraged to discuss their topic with an instructor prior to Nov 14.

*If you have any unique learning needs, please consult with one of the instructors, and we will make every reasonable effort to accommodate you.*

### Texts

Bateson, Gregory. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. Hampton Press, 1979 [2002]  
Duffy, Stephen. *The Dynamics of Grace*, Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1993.  
Garcia-Rivera, Alex. *The Community of the Beautiful : A Theological Aesthetics*.  
Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999.

LeDoux, Joseph E. *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*. New York: Viking, 2002.

Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*. Harper Perennial, 1960 [2001]

**Recommended:**

Gelpi, Donald L. *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001.

**Reader:**

All readings not in one of the texts are available as handouts and/or Adobe Acrobat pdf.

Readings from:

Bateson, Gregory. "Allegory".

Carpenter, James A. *Nature and Grace: Toward an Integral Perspective*. New York: Crossroads, 1988, chap 4, 10.

Garcia-Rivera, "The Tyger and the Lamb"

Graves, Mark. *Mind, Brain, and the Elusive Soul: Emerging Systems of Cognitive Science and Religion*. (in prep), chap 3, 5.

Henri de Lubac. *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. Herder & Herder, 1965 [1998], excerpt.

Ridley, Matt. *Nature Via Nurture: Genes, Experience, and What Makes Us Human*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003, chap 5-7

Rothenberg, David. *Why Birds Sing?* Perseus Books, 2005, chap 7, 8.

## Class Schedule

1. Sept 5 - Setting the Stage
  - Introduction to Course
  - DVD: Tapestry at Lady of Angels, LA, CA
  - Lecture: Visual and Emotional Brain
2. Sept 12 – Aesthetic Brain
  - Reading: LeDoux, ch 1, 2, Introduction to brain and self
  - Reading: Garcia-Rivera, ch 1: Pied beauty
  - DVD and Discussion: Tapestry at Lady of Angels, Continued
  - Lecture and Discussion: Distributed Emotional Brain and Memory
3. Sept 19 – Neurobiology and the Nature of Nature
  - Graves, ch 3, Levels of human systems
  - LeDoux, ch 3, Neurobiology: The most unaccountable of machinery
  - Bateson, ch 1, Introduction
  - LeDoux, ch 4, Building the brain

4. Sept 26 – Nature and Grace
  - Duffy, ch 1, The language of grace
  - Rothenberg, ch 7, The Canary’s brain
  - Rothenberg, ch 8, Listen with the mockingbird
  - Carpenter, ch 10, The nature of grace and the grace of nature
5. Oct 3 – Divine Milieu
  - Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, (142 pp)
6. Oct 10 – Historical Perspectives on Grace
  - Required movie to watch prior to class: *The Shipping News* (2001)
  - Duffy, chs. 2, 3, 4
7. Oct 17 –Memory, Learning, and Mind
  - LeDoux, ch 5-8
  - Bateson, letter at end of book; Allegory
8. Oct 24 – No Class – Reading Week
9. Oct 31 – Habit and Change in American Pragmatism
  - Garcia-Rivera, ch 4, Peirce and The Community of the True
  - Gelpi, ch 4, Charles S. Peirce
  - Garcia-Rivera, ch 5, Royce and The Community of the Good
10. Nov 7 – Mind, Nature, and Self
  - Graves, ch 5, Transcendent relationships
  - Bateson, ch 2-4, Into the Cool
  - LeDoux, ch 9-11, Motivation, health, and the synaptic self
11. Nov 14 – Contemporary Grace
  - Garcia-Rivera, “The Tyger and the Lamb”
  - Henri de Lubac, excerpt
  - Carpenter, ch 4, Rahner on nature and grace
  - Duffy, ch. 7, Karl Rahner: Transcendental Anthropology
  - Garcia-Rivera, ch 6, The Community of the Beautiful
12. Nov 21 – No Class – AAR Conference & Thanksgiving Week
13. Nov 28 – Nature via Nurture
  - Ridley, ch 5-7, Genetics, development, and learning
  - Bateson, ch 5-8, Biological evolution (okay to skim ch 6)
14. Dec 5 – Guest (or Summary Discussion)
  - TBA
15. Dec 12 – No Class – Papers Due