

# Whitney

ton Professor of Natural Philosophy and a professor of physics and astronomy at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, was awarded the prestigious 2019 Templeton Prize which recognizes contributions to "affirming life's spiritual dimensions."

A native of Brazil, Gleiser earned international acclaim for his books, essays, blogs, TV documentaries and conferences that present science as a spiritual quest to understand the origins of the universe and life on earth.

We need science, and need to know science, to better comprehend ourselves and the ever-changing world that is more driven by science and technology with every day. For the past decade, Gleiser has been promoting science as an open forum for everyone by creating the NPR blog titled 13.7 Cosmos & Culture.

The impetus for this endeavor occurred in 2009 when astrophysicist Adam Frank visited Gleiser at Dartmouth to promote his new book *The Constant Fire: Beyond Science vs. Religion Debate*. Gleiser and Frank hatched the idea that science needed a "new voice" that went beyond straight science news reporting, reaching for the meaning behind scientific discovery.

Gleiser: "We wanted to scream to the world that science has a soul, that it doesn't emerge from a value-free vacuum as the sober product of uncaring calculating intellectuals. We wanted to present the passion, the drama, the social and intellectual relevance of science as one of the deepest expressions of our engagement with the mysterious, the unknown aspects of reality."

According to Gleiser, the need for science literacy could not be more relevant or more urgent. Gleiser: "The world is fragmented by polarized viewpoints that refuse to listen to each other; the planet is suffering with the unprecedented growth of our population and its demands for food, energy, and living space; temperatures are rising and the prospects are dire. This is not a legacy we want to leave for future generations."

But science literacy is

threatened by a common misconception that science is incompatible with faith or spirit or religion. Gleiser laments the fact that too many people still have a "very antiquated way of thinking about science and religion in which all scientists try to kill God. Science does not kill God. . . We are all in this together, and our doubts and fears are more universal than we think. As is our ability to wonder. Let us find these universal qualities and work to celebrate and preserve life and this fragile planet that we all share." On the other hand, Gleiser decries "new atheist" scientists bent on making an enemy out of religion. It works both ways.

As an English major in college, I recall that the only class I dropped was physics as I was too intimidated by the mathematics. Then, through meeting Madeleine L'Engle, who claimed she "went to physics to find her faith," I began to read physics, as a humanities person. I started with *Dancing Wu Li Masters*, an exquisite layperson's explanation of quantum physics. Quantum physics, on many levels, defies logic. In this way, it is a kind of poetry, conveying multiple, seemingly divergent, meanings. The more I learned about the contradictions and enigmas that exist in this world of micro-particles invisible to the human eye, I began to feel the awe of a child seeing a new world for the first time.

In fact, think about the child, every child, any child, even the child in each of us. Children, left to their own devices, do science every day. They observe and engage with nature, through curiosity and imagination. For children, everything is connected to everything else, and every day science is reinforcing this concept of interconnectivity. While we need to encourage this natural process of discovery in a child, we also need to rediscover that sense of wonder as adults living in a scientifically-informed world.

Twenty-five centuries ago, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus wrote: "Nature loves to hide." Gleiser calls us to notice: "We see very little of what really goes on around us. Science is our probe into invisible realms. . . If we are persistent, once in a while we see nature stir, even jump, revealing the simple beauty of the unexpected."

Gleiser is an agnostic, but

refuses to write off the possibility of God. In a recent interview from Dartmouth where he has taught since 1991, Gleiser said: "Atheism is inconsistent with the scientific method. Atheism is a belief in non-belief. So you categorically deny something you have no evidence against. I'll keep an open mind because I understand that human knowledge is limited."

Marcelo Gleiser joins a group of 48 Templeton Prize recipients, a list that includes Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Freeman Dyson, and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan for his efforts to promote peace-affirming Islam. He will formally receive the Templeton Prize at a ceremony in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium in New York City on May 29.

On a societal basis, countries without well-trained scientists fall behind and are fated to become technologically dependent. On a personal level, according to Gleiser, the individual loses something else: "Anyone deprived of a scientific view of nature misses out on one of the most magnificent of human achievements, as passionate and life-changing as art, literature and music. Shakespeare, Impressionism, and Einstein should be part of every school's curriculum."

Wonder encompasses all disciplines in life. Certain aspects of quantum reality point directly to the interconnectedness of life. One such concept is entanglement, the idea that two particles separated by a great distance can still communicate, and even act in parallel togetherness. Next month, I will attend a conference at my alma mater, Wake Forest University, entitled "Entanglements: A Conference on the Intersections of Poetry, Science and Art," it is timely because these seemingly unlikely connections are multiplying every day.

Gleiser: "As I once told a journalist who had asked me, somewhat embarrassedly, what is the meaning of life, the meaning of life is to find meaning in life." There is meaning in the mystery.

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