

Reviews

Dean Nelson & Karl Giberson

Quantum Leap: How John Polkinghorne found God in Science and Religion

Oxford: Monarch, 2011. 192 pp. pb. £8.99.
ISBN 978-1-85424-972-2

This biographical compilation, published quite soon after Dr John Polkinghorne's eightieth birthday and a conference held in his honour in 2010, is a fitting tribute to a great thinker, an excellent listener and an exemplary communicator. The book is a succinct summary of key aspects of his thinking about the interplay between science and religion, embedded in a fascinating personal history which details pivotal moments in his life story.

The snappy title, with which it is tempting to play, refers of course to Polkinghorne's 1979 resignation from his Cambridge Chair of Mathematical Physics to become a parish priest and to further his theological studies. Indeed, the authors succumbed to the temptation when they recorded that 'this new position combined both the academic and the priestly roles. It would let him be both a wave and a particle' (97). I shall refrain from further mischievous comments about the metaphor.

Selected major issues of science and religion addressed in this book are listed by Philip Yancey on the back cover: 'Creation, resurrection, afterlife, the problem of pain, the question of meaning, the nature of reality – I can't think of a meta-question that this book omits.' It is, however, the structure of the book itself that is so interesting. It consists of a carefully interwoven tapestry of biographical detail and philosophical thought. One of the authors is an award winning journalist and the other a professor of physics. They have achieved the synthesis of biography and philosophy cleverly by incorporating

quotations from John Polkinghorne's own writings as evidencing his views on particular issues and offering their own understandings of those views, often presented against the biographical backcloth of the context in which they arose in Polkinghorne's career. The ease with which the book can be read has been achieved at the cost of a huge amount of work by the authors in familiarising themselves with Dr Polkinghorne's prolific writings and by discussing the ideas encapsulated in them through many conversations with their author.

The opening chapter sets the scene for what follows by surveying the contemporary scene of science-and-religion debates and the ubiquitous *conflict thesis* promulgated by the 'New Atheism'. Although much of this will be familiar ground to those who are students of issues of science and religion, it is a necessary chapter. It clarifies, to the widest possible readership, the need for the kind of clear thinking which John Polkinghorne has brought to this interdisciplinary area. Succeeding chapters address issues listed in the cover comment cited above.

One of the most helpful features of the biographical content is the frankness and humility with which Polkinghorne, through the careful selection of his quotations by the authors, shares his own puzzles, doubts and journeyings in this tricky area. Another valuable insight is the way in which his own tragedies and sorrows have shaped his responses to suffering in pastoral contexts as well as to the academic study of what C. S. Lewis entitled *The Problem of Pain*. Lewis is another author by whom the sensitivities of the interplay between theory and practice are portrayed in *A Grief Observed* and in his part in Sheldon Vanauken's *A Severe Mercy*.

Quantum Leap has been an enjoyable read and I suspect that, even among the many friends this approachable Christian academic has made, the skilful selection of personal material by his biographers will make them feel that they now know him quite a lot better.

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Thomas Jay Oord (ed.)

The Polkinghorne Reader

London: SPCK, 2010. 246 pp. pb. £12.99.
ISBN 978-0-281-06053-5

Problems are bound to emerge when science and theology appear to be competing over similar explanatory space, so it is particularly refreshing to encounter the thought of man who is able to speak with a measure of authority on both disciplines. John Polkinghorne is such a man. *The Polkinghorne Reader* is a collection of extracts and essays taken from Polkinghorne's important works (in themselves quite vast), arranged thematically, and broadly covering topics that are firstly of a scientific nature, and moving on to subjects more theological. The final section addresses issues that are specifically Christian. From the outset, the book attempts to make clear that Polkinghorne sees no conflict in his role as scientist and theologian as both are disciplines that explore ultimate reality and truth.

An early chapter, 'The Nature of Science', outlines a critical realist approach to science, noting the possibilities as well as the limitations of science. The picture of science that emerges is one of a very human enterprise, involving human judgements and interpretations so that, far from 'disproving religion', science appears akin to other human intellectual endeavours (including theology). Some of the more well-known ar-

eas of apparent conflict between science and religion Polkinghorne dismisses as myths through a consideration of the historical facts. He notes especially some Christian responses to the then new ideas of Galileo and Charles Darwin, arguing that in the latter case at least, the insights of evolution were made very welcome by some leading Churchmen and theologians. The Galileo account is more problematic, but the point is made that the perception of conflict between science and religion is lacking in historical support.

Polkinghorne addresses head-on the question of how God interacts with the world. We simply don't know how God brings about his purposes, but Polkinghorne believes that we cannot embrace a lazy fideism on this matter and that we have the right to search for what he calls the 'causal joint' between God and the cosmos. The problem, by analogy, resembles the classical 'mind-body problem' which has dogged scientists and philosophers to the present day. 'I cannot give up the search for a causal joint' he says and many thinkers will be uncomfortable with this approach preferring to avoid speculation into such mysteries (117). In any case, given that the mind-body problem has thus far proved impenetrable, the 'God-cosmos' problem is not likely to meet with greater success. Perhaps the more worrying concern is that the approach runs the risk of placing God in the 'gaps'.

Polkinghorne's theology is very much informed by his science. Implied throughout his discussions on theological topics is the question, 'What can a man of science bring to these subjects?' The picture of God that emerges in Polkinghorne's theology is that of a transcendent Deity, in some ways not unlike the God of classical theism, with the important difference that for Polkinghorne, God's act of creation is an act of *kenosis*; a self-limiting involvement that more or less allows the creation to 'create itself'. The created order is free, such that the causes of illness and natu-

ral disaster are not dissimilar to the processes that bring about the richness and fecundity of the cosmos; but God's Providence continues through this process. Polkinghorne refers to this as the 'twin gifts of reliability and freedom' (34). This has important implications for the matter of theodicy. If God's involvement in physical processes is limited in this way, it is less clear that he be held responsible for all the evil in the world. Whatever the merits the kenotic view has, the nature of 'kenosis' in this context means that even God does not know the unformed future (though he will have a greater sense of where it is leading than humans). This won't be a view easily digested by evangelical Christians and will also have implications for biblical prophecy and eschatology.

The third part of the book addresses specifically Christian questions such as the nature of Jesus and Scripture. These matters are brilliantly handled, but again a scholarly approach is utilised that will be viewed as scepticism by many Christians. There is no confidence here that Jesus said all the things attributed to him. The early Church, in one example, is responsible for those instructions by Jesus to do with matters in the Church. Perhaps the least 'scientific' chapter in the book concerns the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. Immensely thoughtful, the chapter achieves a beautiful balance between 'high' and 'low' perspectives (we might call his view 'Ecumenical'). The Eucharist is no quasi-magical event, nor simply a memorial, but rather a participation in the 'total action' of the Eucharist in the context of the believing community (207).

The Polkinghorne Reader will be of interest to students of Theology and the Philosophy of Religion. General readers with an interest in issues to do with science and faith will find plenty of thought-provoking material here although the book is pitched high. The harmony that is achieved between

Christianity and natural processes in this book is striking and one feels that Polkinghorne must have a satisfyingly complete view of the world.

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Peter S. Williams

A Sceptic's Guide to Atheism

Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2009. 304 pp. pb. £12.99. ISBN 978 1 84227 614 4

A militant neo-atheism has emerged in the West in the recent past. Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Jacob Wolf and more recently Stephen Hawking are names associated with this movement. Christians in the UK have recognised this secularisation of society resulting in an unsettling change in the social milieu. These neo-atheist postulations have been rebutted by Christians. The author of this book, the apologist Peter Williams has confronted these atheists in this excellent book. He has good credentials for the task. He contributes articles to the Damaris Trust in the UK (a Christian charity concerned with Christianity and our Western culture), and has written relevant books on this issue. His in-depth knowledge of scientific works permits him to discuss the arguments of these atheists within the context of their own statements and scripts. He therefore presents a reasoned analysis of the subject, giving the reader a new perspective on the atheists' aggressive confrontation of the Christian faith.

The print of the book is clear with an informative list of selected resources, comprehensive and detailed end notes for each chapter, but no index. The author's aim is to apply a rigorous, critical judgement to the metaphysical materialism of the 'New Atheism'. He is

also sceptical of the allegedly irrational claims of religion and untruthful claims made in the name of science. These atheists condemn a belief in God saying that religion is wrong and evil but this has actually resulted in some beginning to think about God. The author states that the Christian cannot verify the existence of God through observation. A creative super-Intelligence is an acceptable scientific conclusion because historic Christianity is a rational world-view. Therefore it is possible to counter the emerging positivism embraced by the materialists, challenging their precepts as false. Williams considers that this places atheists in a precarious intellectual position.

For instance, the finely tuned physical laws of the universe, a just right combination, may be interpreted as evidence that our universe was designed for life. Natural theology appears to be alive and well. God's existence cannot be disproved. The late Antony Flew, British philosopher and atheist of the latter part of the twentieth century, supported the author's position in his book *There is a God* and suggested that we should 'follow the evidence, wherever it leads'. The author says that the difference between life and non-life is ontological and not chemical.

In Chapter 2 Williams explains the 'New Atheism'. This is an interesting chapter where he assesses selected atheists' views of themselves from their own writings. The stridency of some individuals is shown when Dawkins wants to make respect for belief in God socially unacceptable, seeking a more just world of atheism. According to Williams, Dawkins, in his book *The God Delusion* does not establish a convincing case for atheism, his statements having drawn adverse criticism from other atheists.

Dawkins says 'Religion is the root of all evil.' This hypothesis is challenged in Chapter 3. Williams shows from their own writings that atheists can be very

selective in the examples they quote from history. A. C. Grayling says that 'faith rejoices in unreason', a statement supported by Dawkins, who believes that religion discourages independent thought, and Dennett, who says that Christians are impervious to reason. Williams believes that, although all three defend rationality, they misunderstand faith and reason. Dawkins' faith is in 'Darwinism'. Michael Ruse supports Williams who says that naturalism is also an act of faith. Christian faith depends on commitment to spiritual resources linked to a knowledge of God. The Bible does not support a belief that is contrary to evidence and reason. Paul supports this position when he says 'test everything. Hold on to the good' (1 Thess 5:21). Williams agrees with this view and says that we should demolish any argument that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). Williams effectively answers Dawkins.

'Nothing buttery' heads Chapter 4, based on the assumption that atheists try to *explain away* belief in God as the result of 'nothing but' this or that natural cause. This is a more difficult passage to grasp because it involves discussions about the beliefs of a number of atheists. For instance, the author shows that Dennett's claims do not answer the question whether or not God exists because he consistently ignores the claims of historical Christianity. A major value of this passage is the excellent referenced end notes.

In 'Does science explain everything?' Williams selects Michel Onfray's writings (*In Defence of Atheism*, 67-68) that monotheism hates scientific studies, loathing both intelligence and true knowledge, showing indiscriminate opposition to religion. Neo-Darwinist claims that the undirected mechanisms of natural selection and random genetic variation can account for the origin and complexity of life (134) remain a stumbling block for atheists. Even Professor Fred Hoyle, the atheist, acknowledged

the role of an Intelligence in the origin of carboniferous life. It should also be noted that atheists in their pronouncements rarely interact with Christian scholarship. They do not answer the Christian claim, which the author acknowledges, that there cannot be just a scientific world-view, remembering that science developed from a theistic milieu.

One agrees with Williams' claims that if theism's understanding of God needs authentication then atheism's claim that there is no God must be substantiated. The author concludes by showing that Dawkins' *The God Delusion* lacks credibility because it ignores current theistic arguments. In this final chapter Williams provides an excellent summary of other related issues. He has achieved his aim. He has answered the sceptics, demonstrating that Christianity, based on faith in Jesus Christ, is credible. This is an outstanding book. Its concise form should allow its use in church discussions and provide an answer for a sceptic friend's agnosticism.

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Hilary Marlow
Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah

Oxford: OUP, 2009. 338 pp. hb. £68.00.
ISBN 978-0-19-956905-2

The environment has been a topic for ethical reflection for some decades now and Christian writers have been engaging with this field for almost as long. Nonetheless it is true, as Hilary Marlow notes, that some otherwise well educated commentators, theological and scientific, from within and outside the faith, show 'a serious misunderstanding of the Old Testament writers' approaches to the natural world' (6). Christian contributions to the debate have, moreover,

often proceeded without much detailed exegesis of the biblical texts. Most Old Testament textual studies have focused on the Creation texts or a few Psalms, the only wide-ranging set of studies being the Earth Bible project. Marlow's book makes an extremely valuable contribution to this area not only because of its thorough and scholarly exegesis but also because she suggests a way of drawing on biblical texts, one which arises from the texts themselves while also relating to ecological understanding. (This is similar in some respects to that presented more recently in the University of Exeter UBEE project.)

Marlow starts where, since the mid-60s, most Christian reflections on the environmental crisis have begun: with Lynn White Jr's accusation that Christian belief led to attitudes towards the non-human world which paved the way to its exploitation and degradation. She spends the first two chapters surveying such attitudes throughout the history of Christian thought, noting the tendency to marginalise creation in relation to a Protestant emphasis upon individual salvation. The conclusion is that, historically, biblical interpretation *did* contribute negatively towards attitudes to non-human creation. Marlow then examines the more recent 'rediscovery' of creation theology and the appearance of attempts to formulate ecologically framed readings of the Bible; here there is a balanced assessment of the Earth Bible Project. She herself employs the idea of an 'ecological triangle' (drawing on Christopher Wright) (110-111): texts are explored with a view to clarifying the relationships between God, humanity and the non-human creation. There follow detailed examinations of three eighth-century BC prophetic writings: Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah (that is, Isaiah 1 - 39). In these Marlow notes a number of features, including the use of the language of the natural world to speak figuratively of God and his people, the detailed observation and knowledge of nature (especially in First

Isaiah), and the sense of interconnect-
edness which is apparent, both between
human action and consequences in the
natural world, and between the Creator
and his creation.

The book closes with a survey of pre-
vious attempts to derive environmental
ethics from the Old Testament and a
helpful focus on points of *commonality*
between modern ecology and the eighth
century prophets' understanding of the
natural world, notably the interrela-
tionships among different elements of
the natural world. A big *discontinuity*
among them – namely the theocentric
view of the prophets – may enable us to
sidestep the tensions that arise in secu-
lar ecological debate when attempting
to place relative values upon human
and non-human elements. Marlow con-
cludes by putting forward a new model
for deriving environmental ethics from
the Old Testament: one of interrelation-
ships (275).

This well-written book is accurately
and comprehensively footnoted and re-
ferenced and any ambiguous language
(such as 'anthropocentric' and 'nature')
is helpfully clarified. It is the published
version of Marlow's doctoral thesis but
she has taken care to make the text
as accessible as possible to the reader
(most terms in Hebrew text are trans-
lated into English and some of the theo-
logical terminology is explained) while
retaining the details demanded by the
format of a theological monograph. The
non-specialist reader might find the
three chapters of detailed biblical in-
terpretation somewhat demanding but
those who seek a text-based grounding
from which to approach this topic will
find it an encouraging volume.

**Cherryl Hunt worked on the 'Uses of
the Bible in Environmental Ethics'
(UBEE) project at the University of
Exeter from 2006-9 (<http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/uses/publications/>) and is currently working on a research project for the Bible Society.**

David Bentley Hart

Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies

New Haven and London: Yale University
Press, 2009. xiv + 253 pp. pb. £14.99.
ISBN-978-0-300-16429-9

It is a rare treat to be completely capti-
vated by a book from its first paragraph
to its closing sentence. This is such a
book and it is a worthy winner of the
2011 Michael Ramsey Prize. Full of
irony, it is a blistering attack on the
shallow and ignorant pretensions of
the new atheists. Bentley Hart notes
how the new atheists perversely attack
Christianity for what it is not, whereas
its critics in the past, most notably
Friedrich Nietzsche, at least attacked
Christianity in full knowledge of what
it actually was. So, Nietzsche attacked
Christianity because of its enfeebling
ethic of compassion, its care for the
weak and powerless and so on, and
not – as with the new atheists – for its
largely mythical violence and brutality.

The main emphasis of the book is its
attack on the staggeringly ignorant but
widespread historical portrayal of a
benighted and brutal Christendom suc-
ceeded by the grand achievements of a
morally superior Enlightenment rati-
onalism. In succeeding chapters Bentley
Hart's method is to cite some recent,
widely believed and disseminated
claim, backed up by suitable quotation
of some modern intellectual luminary,
of Christianity's damaging effect on
rational thought, culture, ethics, sci-
ence or whatever, and its promotion of
violence, war, slavery and other such
ills. He then proceeds systematically to
dismantle these claims, showing that,
while of course Christendom, being hu-
man, has never totally lived up to its
ideals, the reality is the almost exact
opposite of how it is portrayed today.

For readers of this journal Bentley
Hart's demolition of the myth of conflict
between science and theology will prob-
ably be of most interest. As propounded

by J. W. Draper and A. D. White in the latter part of the nineteenth century, this 'conflict myth' will already be well known. Bentley Hart cites these authors, and their dismissal by respectable historians today. He goes on, by way of the modern example of Charles Freeman's *The Closing of the Western Mind*, to show how such myths are still propagated and widely believed. Freeman relates how the great age of science and philosophy in Roman Hellenistic culture was extinguished at the hands of the blind dogmas of Christianity, and how reason was rediscovered in Christendom thanks to Islam and ultimately triumphed following Copernicus's discovery, *ex nihilo* as it were, of heliocentrism (57).

Bentley Hart has plenty of ammunition to aim at this parody of history, noting for example the strong Christian mathematical and astronomical tradition of the mediaeval period to which Copernicus was heir. This tradition included, challenging Aristotle, the concept of impetus, geometric models of uniform and accelerating motions, and the hypothetical possibility of rotation of the earth, expounded by such men as Jean Buridan and Nicholas Oresme (60). Bentley Hart also criticises Freeman's take on the earlier period. Hellenistic science was stagnant by the time of Constantine, and, while the Islamic empire inherited an enormous amount of scholarship from its conquered territories (71), its pre-eminence for a few centuries is often overestimated and in any case ignores the fact of the cultural mix – Christian, Jewish and Islamic – within the Islamic world at the time.

In similar vein, while not wholly exonerating the church, and indeed lamenting its link with the state, Bentley Hart explodes quite a few other myths, for example: the treatment of lepers as pariahs (on the contrary, witness the thousands of hospitals set up by the monastic orders, and the putting of their own lives at risk by so many out of Christian compassion and self-

sacrifice); the acceptance of slavery by the church (a particularly good exposition of Gregory of Nyssa on the evils of slavery); the burning of witches (overwhelmingly by secular rather than religious authorities); and the subjugation of women (their equality and rights).

Bentley Hart is not hopeful about where post-Christian society will go, and notes the capacity of atheist societies in the twentieth century for mass murder on an unimaginable scale. He derides the modern elevation of freedom as being individualist and consumerist. The mere ability to choose is prioritised over what is chosen. Moreover, little do the modern day atheists realise how much they have unwittingly inherited from their Christian past, and how Christianity transformed the ancient world with its new ethic of compassion. He is worried that once the basis for that, namely the view that each person bears the image of God and is therefore of infinite value, is lost, there is little reason to believe that it can survive, floating free from its moorings.

This is a hard-hitting book and a devastating indictment of the shallowness of so much new atheist rhetoric.

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Peter Harrison (ed.)

The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion

Cambridge: CUP, 2010. 307pp. pb. £17.99.
ISBN 978-0-521-71251-4

Cambridge Companions to Religion, which began to emerge in the late 1990s, now number some thirty or so volumes. One relating to the area of science and religion is a most welcome addition given the resurgence of interest in this area rightly noted by the editor,

Peter Harrison (University of Oxford), in his introduction to this volume of fourteen essays. Harrison attributes this revitalisation of attention to four factors: developments in science itself (notably cosmology, neuroscience and genetics); the growth of a vociferous, young-earth, anti-evolution movement (which we later learn has escaped the confines of American Christianity to become a global phenomenon now also present in Islam) (141f); the emergence of an apparently scientifically motivated, aggressive atheism (Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens et al.); and the ethical challenge posed by recent biomedical advancements. Curiously, however, the essays of this volume are not structured around this fourfold analysis, but rather an alternative threefold schema of historical perspectives, contemporary issues and philosophical reflections. While not thus of programmatic significance, the reader will, nevertheless, be able to garner responses to the four key areas that Harrison identifies from the essays on offer. The essayists themselves, who are virtually all from the United Kingdom and North America, represent a range of personal position from atheism to explicit faith commitment. The religious perspectives examined are almost exclusively those of Western monotheism, predominantly Christianity, and the forms of atheism that have developed alongside them.

Such is the breadth of topic discussed and the depth of detail elaborated that it is not possible, in a review of this scale, to provide even the semblance of a comprehensive overview. In fact, of course, there is no one argument to the volume given the diversity of the contributors and their range of subjects. If there is an underlying unity it is rather a common commitment to the inherent value of the science and religion debate. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to provide, by way of example, a set of those strands of debate that seized this reviewer's attention (and there were many). I shall restrict myself to three:

the contribution of science to secularisation; the question of whether evolution has a goal; and the proposal of a multiverse (a system of many universes of which ours is just one).

Is the rise of science, especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century, responsible for the secularisation of society, that is, for both the replacement of religious authority by a civil alternative and (as a distinct component of the process) the loss of the general credibility of religious belief? Contrary to the new breed of aggressive atheist alluded to above, for John Hedley Brooke 'there is no simple or general answer' (103). Close examination reveals that most Victorians who gave up their faith did so, according to their own accounts, not because of scientific advance but for theological reasons – because of the depiction of God as vengeful and anthropomorphic, because of the immorality of eternal punishment in hell, because of the plurality of claims made by different traditions (111f, cf. Michael Ruse (236)). Again, in our own day, it seems that the expansion of secularisation has more to do with socio-economic and political change than any scientifically inspired naturalistic materialism. The weakening of social ties due to social mobility and the growth of consumerism and the concomitant pursuit of hedonism are more likely to be the cause (113). Of course, science is indirectly implicated by way of its technological offshoots, but not, on this account, as a direct, philosophical competitor.

If you are already familiar with the work of Simon Conway Morris then you will be aware of his direct challenge to the Neo-Darwinian consensus, expressed by Stephen Jay Gould, that, if one were to replay the process of evolution on earth, each time it would issue in wildly divergent, unpredictable results. Not so, says Conway Morris, 'however many times we re-run the tape [of the evolution of life], we will still end up with much the same result' (150). Why? For Conway Morris there are two prin-

cipal strands of evidence: that the major transitions in the process all have widespread scaffolding precursors (154-165); and the ubiquitous phenomenon of evolutionary convergence (biological, molecular and social forms independently 'navigate to the same solutions') (150). From this he draws a remarkable conclusion: 'evolution can be...seen as a sort of search engine, driven to be sure by a Darwinian motor, but one that *effectively discovers the inevitable*' (151, my emphasis). In other words the evolutionary process seems to reflect a deeper reality, an organisational principle that leads seemingly inert matter to, eventually, human mind and language. Consequently, religious consciousness is to be seen as the outcome of a process intended to allow matter to 'intuit, then know, and finally love the Maker' (153).

Both William Stoeger and John Haught make mention of the apparent fine-tuning required of both the initial conditions and the physical constants that shape our universe if life, let alone intelligent life, is to emerge (183f, 270). To obviate the embarrassment that this might cause to a view of chance as a primary engine of development, a so-called multiverse is postulated – a system of such a number of multiple and independent universes that the odds of the conditions for the development of life occurring in at least one of them is drastically reduced. However, neither Stoeger nor Haught think that the multiverse escapes the embarrassment that motivates its invention. Stoeger suggests that in all probability a multiverse would require a fine-tuning of its own in the underlying physical parameters that make it possible (184). And Haught argues that, if the emergence of consciousness requires a universe to bring it about, then the same argument could apply to a multiverse (271f). It is a question of quantitative scale not qualitative distinction.

Who then is this Companion for? Not, I would suggest, the person just setting out on the journey of discovery

of the science-religion debate. A single-authored introduction would be more profitable than attempting to navigate the breadth of assumption and interest in this volume. But for one already familiar with some of the territory, this collection of essays provides a stimulating way to be both brought 'up to speed' in key areas of the contemporary debate and to gain from the deeper historical perspective it affords. It would also make an excellent basis for discussion in a multi-disciplinary group. It does, however, suffer from the weakness apparent in much of the science-religion debate that, speaking from a specifically Christian perspective, while the science is comparatively detailed and rich (and generally sets the agenda) the theology is rather thin and attenuated. Too often we have to make do with a generic form of monotheism that is but a diluted caricature of the Christian account of God.

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Nancy Morvillo

Science and Religion: Understanding the Issues

Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 358pp. pb. £23.99. ISBN 978-1-4051-8965-1

Nancy Morvillo describes herself as a geneticist, who is neither a theologian nor a philosopher. She provides a comprehensive introduction to the study of the dialogue between science and religion, although it should be noted that she predominantly explores a theistic Christian position.

The book is divided into four sections: systems of thought, cosmology, evolution, and ethics, which together address the key issues in the debates between science and faith. Throughout the book each chapter helpfully begins with a summary and ends with questions for discussion.

Important aspects of science such as the heliocentric solar system, relativity, quantum mechanics, DNA, paleontology, paleogeography, primate and human evolution are each carefully explained. Likewise the philosophical and theological issues of biblical interpretation, epistemology, and models of God's activity in the world are also addressed. The basis of understanding the universe and human life in Greek philosophy, medieval theology, and seventeenth and eighteenth century science and philosophy are examined, before she explores the methodologies and limits of both science and theology.

The historical developments of cosmology and evolution are helpfully considered as a precursor to exploration of the modern understanding of the origin of the universe and of life. Into these accounts Morvillo adds important discussions of myths and Genesis, eschatology and the sense of an unknowable future in both science and theology, and the arguments expressed by both creationism and its modern development, Intelligent Design.

The last section of the book handles the more modern developments and concerns in the areas of neuroscience, genetic engineering and the environment. We are helped to understand the possible nature of mind, spirit and soul,

the rights and wrongs of biotechnology together with questions about 'playing God', and the need for human beings to take action in the serious issues of population, ecology and global warming.

The author constantly looks to serious dialogue rather than conflict between these two important fields of studying the universe and the human context within it. She provides a solid understanding of the most important issues in this dialogue, demonstrating throughout the ways in which theology can learn from the discoveries of science and address the questions that are raised for belief in God.

Morvillo has a most helpful style which expresses complex scientific and philosophical concepts in ways that are easy to digest and understand. Her work will prove to be a helpful text for theology students wishing to engage in debate with those questioning the relevance of theology in the modern world, and for students of the sciences wanting to explore theological answers to the boundary questions where science has reached its limit of explanation.

John Weaver teaches Christianity and Science at Cardiff University and is chair of the John Ray Initiative, which connects environment, science and Christianity.



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