

Reviews

John Polkinghorne
Encountering Scripture: A Scientist Explores the Bible

London: SPCK, 2010. 108pp. pb. £9.99.
 ISBN 978-0-281-06253-9

In this short book, John Polkinghorne draws on sixty years experience of reading the Bible to offer helpful and informative insights on the Scriptures from his own perspective. Although he does not explicitly state this, Polkinghorne's comments are addressed both to those who read the Bible literally and uncritically, and to those who deny its historicity. He does not aim at encyclopedic coverage of scholarly issues, but succinctly summarises and simplifies some of the debates and then offers his balanced and thoughtful opinion on the matter in question.

The book begins with three short introductory chapters covering the multi-layered and developing nature of Scripture, how the stories of creation and fall intersect with modern scientific knowledge, and an honest appreciation of some of the ambiguities found within the pages of the Bible. Polkinghorne then devotes a chapter each to key sections of the biblical text. The Old Testament receives relatively little attention as the focus of only one chapter ('Israel's Bible'). This is followed by chapters entitled respectively 'The Gospels', 'Cross and Resurrection', 'The Pauline writings', and 'Other New Testament writings'. In each of these, the reader will find a good, accessible summary of issues and pertinent reflections on matters of significance.

Polkinghorne is never afraid of stating his own conclusions yet does so with the grace and humility that characterises his writing and speaking. The book ends with a brief discussion of three New Testament passages that Polkinghorne considers to have particular

profundity: the Prologue to John's Gospel, and sections of Colossians 1 and Romans 8. Readers of this book will not find extended discussion of apparent conflicts between the Bible and science, although a Further Reading section will point them to useful resources, including previous publications by Polkinghorne. What they will find is a reasoned and informed introduction to the Bible, one that combines, in relatively few pages, an impressive amount of detail with an honest evaluation of some of the questions that intelligent readers of Scripture will have.

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John Polkinghorne (ed.)
The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology

Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010. 215+xi pp. pb. £19.99. ISBN 978-0-828-6512-0

The world exists in relation to God; therefore it may be expected to display or echo some of its Creator's characteristics, or to be influenced by them. Specifically, the Christian doctrine that God is Trinity in Unity is commonly held to imply that there is relationality within the Godhead. Meanwhile, physical relationships exist in the world of nature; in particular, one of the most subtle of these is the phenomenon of 'entanglement' in quantum systems. The notion of 'relationship', then, could be a key to provide insights concerning the connection between God and the universe. The essays in this volume are written with the goal of exploring

these themes, and the authors include some very distinguished names covering a wide range of fields of scholarship, including a strong representation from the Orthodox Christian tradition.

There is a certain public interest in quantum things. An intriguing point of view, expressed by the writer Bonnie Greer in a recent radio interview with Joan Bakewell, is that the Trinity and Unity of God are like two aspects connected by a quantum uncertainty principle. Viewed one way you have one description of God, viewed another way you have the other. This interesting suggestion is not discussed in the present book, however.

Two issues are of importance regarding an essay collection of this kind: one concerns the quality of the essays in their own right, and the other is to do with whether the wider goal of the enterprise has been achieved. To answer the second question first, I think that the book's success in connecting divine and physical relationality is rather limited. A few of the authors seriously attempt to bridge the two areas. The prominent Orthodox scholar John Zizioulas contributes a clear and engaging theological article, one of the best chapters in the book, and attempts to relate to the physics, but this is not his speciality. Panos Ligomenides and Argyris Nicolaidis, an electrical engineer and physicist respectively, present extremely broad surveys of physics, and try to bring God into their pictures, but I felt that the central issues were not well targeted. Most of the other writers did not venture far from their own area, and some seemed to deny that any useful connection could be made. In the second half of the book there is no mention of quantum physics. The writers write with enthusiasm, but on the whole a slight lack of confidence in the enterprise comes across, and certainly a lack of real precision in answering the key questions.

After an initial scene-setting discus-

sion by John Polkinghorne, well up to his usual standards, there is a professionally competent account of quantum entanglement by an eminent quantum theorist, Jeffrey Bub. Alas, the level is ill-judged and the explanations will be largely incomprehensible to non-physicists. Much better is the following chapter on the same subject by Anton Zeilinger, a well-known experimentalist in quantum phenomena. Michael Heller then presents a good but slightly technical account of Mach's principle, which asserts that all the matter in the universe is interrelated, although it must be said that this idea has somewhat fallen by the wayside nowadays. There follows an essay on relational ontology by Wesley Wildman, a philosopher. He attempts a serious analysis of relationality but his claims are strongly criticised by other contributors, and probably with justification it seems to me.

What a difference in coming to the article by Kallistos Ware on basic Christian Trinitarian teaching. Outstandingly clear, readable and helpful, this should be in the hands of all Christians with an interest in theology, and of all theological students in particular! In contrast again, the next contribution, by Lewis Ayres, I found full of verbose and barely penetrable generalities.

Two chapters, by Michael Welker and David Martin, deal with sociological aspects of relationship. I felt that Martin's was the more relevant of the two accounts, despite not being easy reading, though Welker has some noteworthy things to say about the relational propensities of babies. Finally, Sarah Coakley presents a highly informative summary of the theological and philosophical issues – though not the physics issues – that have been discussed in the text. Given the varied quality of the preceding essays, her 'afterword' is extremely valuable, and should probably be turned to at an early stage by most readers.

The book is 'good in parts' but a little disappointing on the whole. In writing on such subtle, varied and often difficult subject matter, a thoroughly didactic style of presentation is in my view essential if there is to be effective communication to a broad readership, and not all the writers appreciated the need for this. Few readers will understand all of this book. I hope that another effort will be made to develop this fascinating and important subject further.

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Nancey Murphy & Christopher C. Knight (eds.)

Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion

Aldershot, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010. 243 pp. hb. \$52.25. ISBN 978-1-4094-1050-8

Murphy and Knight have drawn together a sort of 'all-star cast' to offer the next work in the Ashgate Science and Religion Series – this time an exploration of human identity as it relates to developments in theology, science, technology, and philosophy (including insights from neuroscience, genetics, artificial intelligence, and biomedical engineering). Murphy begins the volume with a reflection from theologian Richard Lints who claims that 'radical confusion about what it means to be human has...brought an opportunity for renewed reflection on the nature of human identity'.(1) The contributors seize this opportunity in splendid fashion by discussing a wide range of complex issues while being diligent to ground the investigation in practical inquiry.

As the reader progresses through each chapter it becomes clear why the emphasis is less on human nature and more on human *identity*. Namely, insights from multiple disciplines now make it difficult to claim that humans

possess a fixed nature. Not only are we immensely shaped by our social context, but we are unique among life on earth in so far as we can reflect on our existence, and in doing so, alter our attitudes and behaviour. Thus, an exploration of 'identity' renders a much more interesting and nuanced way of cultivating an interdisciplinary examination between fields of study. In addition to this focus on the development of human identity, the editors deserve credit for paying close attention to the fact that concepts of philosophy, theology, and science are themselves products of human construction. So, the focus of this volume is not simply on the effects of developments in science and technology on human identity, but on the intricate interplay between the two.

One of the interesting features of this book is the way in which the authors are able to relate complex material to practical concerns. A rich example of this appears in the opening section as George F.R. Ellis discusses 'fundamentalism' as not simply a religious disorder, but a mindset that plagues science as well. Ellis simply defines fundamentalism as 'a partial truth proclaimed as the whole truth'.(59) In the end, he proposes ways of overcoming fundamentalism that focus on embracing the multi-causal nature of things and the ability to relate phenomena to their broader context.

Perhaps the central claim of the volume – which implicitly threads the chapters together – is the notion that human identity is in large part formed through multiple processes of interrelated behaviour. A helpful illustration comes from Warren S. Brown's chapter on human uniqueness. Brown claims that 'there is a persistent Augustinian/Cartesian error made when we presume that human uniqueness necessarily lies within us, *rather than between us*'.(98) In this sense, the biological differences between humans and our closest animal kin are only quantitative in nature, so the distinctiveness of human life is a

product of our ability to relate in a rich social environment.

This edited volume is impressive in both its breadth and depth. The contributors have addressed key issues at the intersection between science and religion and they have done so by walking the fine line between theological and scientific integrity – as they understand that the two fields are not exclusive of one another. The book deals with advanced topics, so teaching faculty, researchers, and students will find it particularly insightful; however, it is sufficiently accessible to allow the casual reader to appreciate the practical issues addressed therein. On the whole, Murphy and Knight have provided a well-written and thoughtful addition to the growing literature on the complex relationship between science and religion.

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Robert J Spitzer

New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy

Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010. 319 pp. pb. £18.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-6383-6

This book, by an American Jesuit theologian, addresses the question of God's existence through the prism of historic Christian logical arguments and experimentally justified scientific cosmology. His strategy is similar to that of the evangelical William Lane Craig. The term 'proofs' can be taken here as meaning arguments and/or evidence. The evidential side is especially concerned with the second proposition of the Kalam cosmological argument,

namely:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the universe has a cause.

A careful survey of cosmological arguments is presented in Part 1, Chapter 1, in which the BGV (Borde, Guth, Vilenkin) theorem of 2003 is introduced and explained. This indicates that all inflationary cosmologies with an average Hubble expansion greater than zero must have a beginning. Later, there is a postscript (75 – 103) written by physicist co-author, Bruce Gordon, considering implications of the BGV theorem for string landscape theories, M theories, inflationary and oscillating cosmologies, contending that they are all subject to the BGV theorem and, therefore, all require a transcendent immaterial Creator. Chapter 2 discusses the apparent fine-tuning of physical constants for life in a precise and competent manner, including some arguments against the multiverse interpretation.

Part 2 (chapters 3 – 6) contains the author's original formal arguments for God's existence. These are exacting and cogent refinements of the conditional arguments for a necessary Being. In explaining these, Dr Spitzer distinguishes between *Conditioned* and *Unconditioned* Realities, and argues step by step, and with the aid of flow diagrams, that: (a) there must exist at least one unconditioned reality in all reality; that this must be (b) the simplest possible reality; (c) absolutely unique; (d) unrestricted; and (e) the continuous creator of all else that is. Further extensive sections follow with Lonergan's argument that aims to demonstrate that such a Creator must be unconditioned in understanding and intelligibility. These are connected to Spitzer's 'proofs'. Chapter 5 draws upon the prohibition, by the great mathematician David Hilbert, against the existence of certain types of infinities (*C-infinities*) or infinite past time. This points to an *A-infinity*, that

is, a Reality that transcends both time and the axioms of finite mathematics.

Part 3 (chapters 7-8) is headed: 'The Transcendentals: The divine and human mysteries'. Here Spitzer considers three dimensions of absolute Simplicity to which human beings have access: Love, Goodness and Beauty. Their combination with Being itself (the one unconditioned Reality) equates to a modified form of the medieval concept of 'the transcendentals'. He argues that human consciousness seems to possess five aspirations or desires that can only be satisfied by these transcendentals. By this turn of argument, he goes beyond a somewhat austere logical defence of theism to a more holistic apologetic.

Readers of *Science and Christian Belief* are accustomed to abstract reasoning and should find this book an informative and inspiring contribution to the literature. The author has taken great care in the logical development of his case and in documented references – over 300 of them – to the pertinent scientific and philosophical literature. Full indices are provided. Overall Spitzer provides a judicious account of modern cosmological evidence and theories and the metaphysical implications that flow from them.

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Keith Ward

More than Matter? What Humans Really Are

Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010. 224 pp. pb.
£7.19. ISBN 978-0-7459-6247-4

Reviews sometimes say as much if not more about the reviewer than the reviewed. I admit to having mixed feel-

ings about this book which I have still not fully resolved, but I think these may be as much my 'problem' as due to the book alone.

Keith Ward is well known as an insightful and productive theologian skilfully able to conduct conversations with religion, philosophy and science, and this is in many ways another highly competent and informative work. *More than Matter* makes a real and significant contribution to the debate between secular philosophical and more theologically inspired accounts of mind and meaning.

In part a dialogue with his former tutors, especially Gilbert Ryle and A.J. Ayer, Ward sets out to recover arguments in favour of seeing 'human experiences and actions as important and human persons as of intrinsic value in a universe like this', (8) a view with which all Christians should resonate. If nothing else, Ward's book serves as a handy, easily comprehended introduction to a variety of positions in the philosophy of mind, consciousness and personal identity, thus setting the scene for his own, a version of dual-aspect idealism.

The writing is clear and there are many delightful sunbeams of 'wicked' humour and irony. We gather that 'The English are expected to control their passions or, more probably, it is assumed that they do not have any passions to control'!(147) Later we learn that Ryle's reductive descriptions of feelings as 'thrills, twinges, pangs, throbs, wrenches, itches, prickings, chills, glows, loads, qualms, hankerings, curdlings, sinkings, tensions, gnawings and shocks' can only lead one to assume that 'his inner life was a succession of episodes of chronic indigestion'!(158) It also seems that one possible reason why monkeys continue to press buttons to receive orgasm mimicking brain stimulation 'was because they couldn't read Dostoevsky'!(157)

So what was my problem? At the

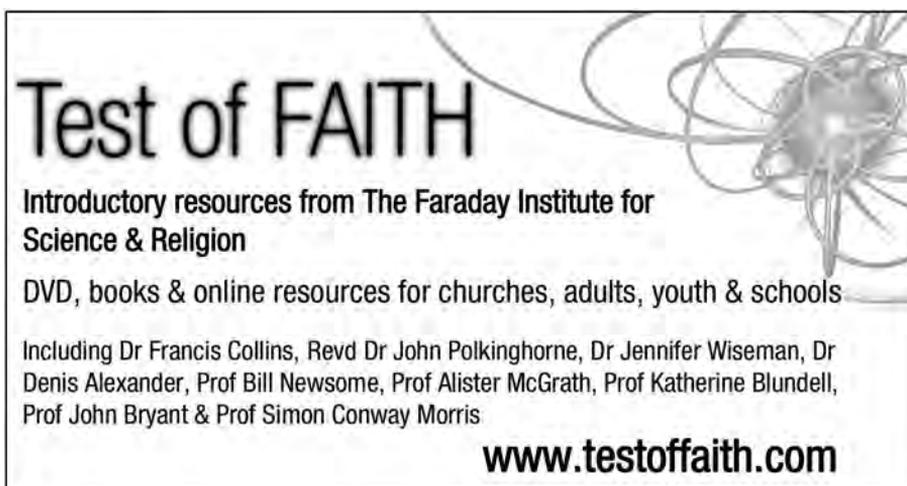
start I had vague feelings of unease that while I agreed with much of what I read, there was still a nagging feeling that all was not well. Curiously, when reading Ward's book I empathised with Ward's own response to reading Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*: 'It had the peculiar property that while I was reading it I believed it. Only when I stopped reading it did I know that it was wrong but I could never quite formulate just what was wrong with it.'(13)

On reflection, I wonder whether we really need to embrace Ward's dual-aspect idealism and emergent process philosophy in which there 'is only the reality that is mind and its expression and appearance in the dynamic and developing forms of an open and emergent universe',(197) or is a more fundamental, participatory ontology required; one based on premodern understanding and

which more radically differentiates the only reality of *the Creator* from the gift of Creation?

I suspect that my problem, if problem it is, is that I have moved too far in the direction of (radical) theological orthodoxy and away from the liberal theological position which Ward espouses, and which I used to share. Hence, the book as a whole had a rather nostalgic feel for me. Keith Ward and I may now be looking at these issues from different sides of the Enlightenment. But I am glad, nevertheless, that he has given us this book to add to our apologetic armoury!

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The advertisement is enclosed in a rectangular border. On the right side, there is a grayscale illustration of a human brain with several curved lines representing neural pathways or connections. The text is arranged on the left side of the box.

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