

will appreciate both." Although science often inhibits us from thinking we know something we actually do not, it cannot provide meaning to life. This allows for spiritual intelligence which may produce "epistemological modesty" and aid in daily living.

Myers gives illustrations to support both the bane and blessing of intuition. The bane involves showing readers that confidence in their knowledge is often misplaced. For instance, most people think Reno is east of Los Angeles, Rome south of New York, and Atlanta east of Detroit; they are not. The blessing involves being able to do hundreds of things like walking, driving, and talking without thinking much about them.

Myers' thirteen chapters investigate a variety of intuitive tendencies including social, sports, investment, clinical, interviewer, risk, gamblers' and psychic. Fifty-six pages of notes and thirteen pages of indices are helpful for further study.

This is a superb book – informative, absorbing, insightful – and I highly recommend it. While full of results based on scientific research, it is nevertheless faith friendly. Its information will enable the reader to better grasp reality and move in the direction of much needed empirical intuition.

*Reviewed by Richard Ruble, John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR 72761.*



## Letters

### Thomas Aquinas and RFEP

On the surface, the notion of a Robust Formational Economy Principle (RFEP), proposed by Howard Van Till (*PSCF* 54 [2002]: 232–9) appears to be compatible both with the scientific enterprise and Christian faith. It is essentially an agnostic position; one that makes a minimalist and negative claim about divine action (it is not necessary for God to act in a certain way), and avoids conflict with the working assumptions of scientific investigation. In other words, it is a friendly, non-threatening, comfortable position to take.

Such a view, however, serves neither science nor Christianity. It says nothing new to the majority of scientists who hold to either philosophical naturalism (or in Van Till's terminology, "maximal naturalism") or methodological naturalism. Neither does it offer much to Christians, who are all called to be "salt" and "light" to the world. How can it? A perspective of indifference to the question of divine action, other than placing a limit on God's ability to act in a certain way ("form-conferring intervention") is at best, interesting but without implications for personal response, apologetics, and evangelism.

Perhaps, a better alternative to RFEP is not ID, which posits the "form-conferring intervention" that RFEP denies, but a return to a more ancient understanding of creation and change as argued by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>1</sup>

Both Van Till and Aquinas would agree that any account of the physical world in the natural sciences is *not* inherently incomplete, contrary to ID and those who search for divine agency in the indeterminism of chaos theory or quantum theory. Aquinas, however, did not stop at that point. For him, although there are real and "amply equipped" natural causes (what he referred to as secondary causes), God is the complete and ultimate cause of the physical world. The secondary causes apply only to the world of changing things. Anything that changes requires an underlying material reality. Creating, however, is an action peculiar to God alone. To create is not to act on some already existing material, but to cause something to come into existence and to preserve its state of existence. To create, therefore, is to give existence. Anything separated from the cause of its existence would cease to exist. For Aquinas, God's act of creation is a constant, ongoing, and intimate event. Creation, however, is not mingled with the secondary operations of nature, but is presupposed by these operations. Interestingly, Aquinas saw no problems with an eternal universe because such a universe, would nevertheless, depend on God for its existence. In fact, there can be no conflict between creation and any scientific theory, because the former deals with creation and the primary cause, while the latter deals with change in preexisting material and secondary causes. The radical dependence of all things upon God as the cause of being is fully compatible with the scientific discovery of causes in nature. So, even though God is the immediate cause of all existing things, the material in the natural world is its own true cause of effects.

In what way is this Thomistic view superior to RFEP? First, it does not attempt to limit divine agency to certain modes and not others. God can and has acted in direct ways in the natural order (i.e., "form-conferring interventions") by bypassing secondary causes so that he himself produces either their natural effects, or possibly even effects beyond their power (what we would call miracles). That is not to say that nature is lacking in the power to bring about certain natural structures, but it is to say that the Author of nature has the power to override secondary causes if he so chooses. Second, a proper understanding of the Thomistic view (which my brief account of it in this letter is wholly inadequate in imparting) allows for Christians to maintain the historicity of unusual (or supernatural) biblical events, rather than resort to "new" interpretations. Thus, in spite of nature's completeness, there are certain events that nature was never meant to accomplish (s.a. creation, salvation, endowment of God's image upon humankind) and were never within nature's powers. RFEP would simply deny their historicity, or force natural scientific explanations upon them. Third, it is explicitly and uniquely Christian in its form, employing the concept of creation out of nothing and inextricably binding it with the God of Christianity. For Aquinas, creation is God's way of sharing and reproducing His inherent goodness. Fourth, because it is explicitly Christian, it opposes philosophical naturalism, and demands personal responses from Christians. We, as creatures, are true causes in our own right, and our actions have real consequences in the world. We understand how we *should* act because we now have an account (albeit incomplete given our inherent limitations) of how and why God acts. RFEP simply avoids the question of divine agency.

In spite of my criticisms of RFEP, to be fair, it offers a helpful starting point for discussion, as we have already seen. What we need to remember is that it is just that.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>*Summa theologiae* I, q. 45-7 and I, q. 103-5.

Adrian Teo  
ASA Member  
Department of Psychology  
Whitworth College  
Spokane, WA 99251

## Response to Discher and Van Till Dialogue

Since Mark Discher seems to have generated all of the negative comment in the Discher-Van Till dialogue (Letters, March 2003), I thought in the interest of balance, I might offer three criticisms of Howard Van Till's thesis:

1. Given his own theological predisposition to believe the universe as it really is, is most probably the universe as imagined by RFEP (Robust Formational Economy Principle) advocates, and his acknowledged inability to prove that or to disprove ID (Intelligent Design), Van Till's RFEP seems as opened as ID to the charge of being folk science.

2. Van Till by his own admission believes that God exists, created the universe, and can act within it. Therefore he has no theological justification for denying that God could be involved in occasional episodic acts of special creation. Indeed, one could argue that many of Jesus' miracles were precisely such acts and that in doing them, Jesus was drawing our attention to the creative capacity of the divine word as revealed in the first chapter of Genesis.

3. RFEP comes perilously close to deism. This is not to say that Van Till is a deist, but it is to say that his reasons for not being a deist tend to undermine RFEP.

I found the exchange between Discher and Van Till quite enlightening. In my judgment, the argument went to Discher.

Ben M. Carter  
ASA Member  
Marbletree Apartments, Apt. #2030  
4077 North Beltline  
Irving, TX 75038  
Cartersalma@aol.com

## On Super-Intelligent Design

The December 2002 issue of *PSCF* highlighted various approaches to divine design, including Van Till's advanced RFEP (Robust Formational Economy Principle) along with more standard Intelligent Design (ID). This same special issue also included a remarkably prescient and highly relevant observation by Moorad Alexanian made while commenting upon Thorson's wider reflections concerning naturalism (*PSCF* 54: 287-8). In this, Alexanian exposes questions that may be "truly beyond the reaches of science no matter how it is defined" (p. 287).

The salient "ontological problem" which Alexanian addresses is absolutely crucial for those of us who support intelligent design as long as it is not *anthropocentrically* construed. Following Alexanian, we may suppose the existence of a Creator, "conscious and intelligent to an infinitely higher degree" (p. 288), presumably quite transcending human capacities of rational understanding and so even science. He postulates that this idea may constitute the "underlying rationale for advocates of intelligent design to infer an Intelligent Design" (p. 288). Unfortunately the general impetus for ID seems to be rather more complex and unnecessarily subject to *anthropomorphic* considerations.

Most standard discussions of ID entail, if unwittingly so, a *hidden* proviso akin to the Protagorean motto whereby *man is the measure of all things*. In order to even qualify, a *properly intelligent* design ought presumably to be accessible through human reason and scientific understanding at least in principle. However, Scripture often reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. So it would be quite presumptuous, even idolatrous, to postulate conformity between God's capacities and human expectations. Even if God wished to provide us with the blue print and explanation about intelligently designing and sustaining His creation, we could not grasp this message. Human capacities *are not infinite*, Alexanian's most telling point!

Perhaps Super-Intelligent Design (SID) might better fit the infinite capacity of God's own "toolbox" ranging well beyond potential scientific acumen. This wider scope could include various natural processes and chance events often designated "acausal," stochastic, or random. For if intelligent design were construed less *anthropocentrically*, it *could* accommodate natural processes and events that transcend our capacity for complete understanding. Now, a creator God must possess intelligence characteristic of conscious beings, Alexanian stresses, though *extending far beyond our human capacities* even "to an infinitely higher degree" (p. 288). An *adequate* assessment of intelligent design would therefore at least have to *incorporate*, rather than *exclude*, natural processes that transcend complete scientific comprehension. Accordingly, there is really no a priori justification for trying to "eliminate chance" in the style that some mainline proponents of *restrictive* ID unnecessarily choose.

In conclusion, intelligent design as such is not the central issue but rather its *range, scope, and degree*. Most Christian believers recognize that God is able to create and sustain the universe by whatever means he deems appropriate. Humans ought not to pretend to be privy to his ways or to adjudicate what constitutes legitimate modes of design. If we truly acknowledge that God's ways cannot be fully accessible to human understanding, it would behoove us to employ apophatic theology rather than relying upon humanistic Protagorean prescriptions. A humble God-centered view of these matters, appropriately reflecting a child-like modesty, would openly concede his "infinitely higher degree" of intelligence (p. 288), being receptive to hints of that veiled Super-Intelligent Design so deeply embedded all throughout creation.

Thaddeus J. Trenn  
CSCA Member  
University of Toronto  
t.trenn@utoronto.ca