Arie Leegwater

The Two-Book Metaphor: What Questions Do We Need to Ask?

Recently I came across a collection of edited lectures given by Olaf Pedersen entitled *The Two Books*: *Historical Notes on Some Interactions between Natural Science and Theology* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Foundation, 2007). Reading the book reminded me once again how historically formative the two-book metaphor has been in framing our questions and indwelling our Western consciousness concerning the relation of science and religion.

For many interpreters, the relation of science and religion translated into the question of the relation of science, a study of the book of nature, and theology, a study of the book of sacred Scriptures (and, for some, a study of God). In short, the perceived relationship (and question posed) is the relation of science and theology conceived frequently as a relationship between two unitary entities, even disciplines. I was asked this very question when considering the editorship of *PSCF*. As I recall, I hesitated a moment before I replied. It is, indeed, a very common question, but one which, as Pedersen brilliantly shows, carries a great deal of historical freight. Let me attempt to explain why I hesitated.

> "In our questions
> lie our principles of analysis,
> and our answers
> may express whatever
> those principles
> are able to yield."

These words by Susanne Langer, written many years ago in her landmark book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1941), still ring true today. What questions should we and may we ask concerning the study of these two books? First, what are these entities called "science" and "theology"? Does "science" refer to the theoretical results obtained? To the plethora of practices one needs to competently perform in order to collect data and detect patterns of interaction? Or does "science" refer to the whole culture-imbedded processes of theory formation and experimentation? What of "theology"? Are we referring to systematic theology? Biblical theology? A natural theology?

Also of importance to our present-day situation is the question: is it helpful to conflate religion and theology, as is frequently done? What then do we make of religions that do not profess to have a god? Consider the recent book *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science, and A. S. Eddington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) by Matthew Stanley. In it he shows that if we were to employ the usual propositional categories of theology, we would see few connections between Eddington's theology and science. But with respect to Eddington's religion and his astrophysics, things are much different.

I think we tend to over-intellectualize the relationship of science and religion. Somehow, the tenor of the question posed leads us to compare propositional statements (truths), that is, those stating scientific results and those statements (truths) formulated by the latest ortho-

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dox systematic theology. After making the comparison, and developing harmonizing strategies if they disagree, we often think the question of the relationship of the two books is adequately answered.

Second, the metaphor of the two books, two books of revelation, invites other questions. For example, what is the relationship of these two books? Do we have two books that are independent of each other, with the one book revealing to us that God created, and the other book telling us how he did it? Is it that straightforward? Do the books parallel or complement each other? Do they stand in a hierarchical relationship? One could go on.

Note, too, books are meant to be read, in short, interpreted by readers. Any interpretation entangles us in hermeneutical concerns. That invariably makes things more complex than we usually admit. One missing element has been highlighted by recent work in the philosophy and history of science. The practical turn in the philosophy of science is evidenced by a multitude of historical case studies in which the general trait is the insistence on the local character and heterogeneity of scientific practices, and correlatively, on the contingency of stabilized results. Those case studies help to articulate the cultural situatedness of scientific practice, putting science in its place. I maintain that we can learn from these studies and should not write them off simply as postmodern pabulum.

For too long the relation of science and religion, considered as one between science and theology, has been seen solely as an intellectual comparative exercise. We have often isolated theology and science from their deeper cultural contexts. We are satisfied to compare the "objective truths of science" with the "objective truths of Scripture." But we must take seriously the fact that the relation of science and religion is not simply of theoretical concern. It is a matter of life and death, and it must bear fruit in our lives. Do our scientific and technological activities enhance human flourishing, promote justice, and provide creational care? Few answers are final; few explanations are complete. However, the truth in which we stand and move and have our being is to be lived and not simply claimed. ☙

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In This Issue

Following up on the December 2008 issue of *PSCF*, we begin this first 2009 issue with a discussion of the character of chance, "Chance for a Purpose," in an article written by John Hall. Next, Ronald Larson revisits "God of the Gap" and design arguments, and elaborates whether such arguments provide a threat or an opportunity for apologetics. In the third article, J. Brian Pitts takes a close look at the validity of young-earth RATE project arguments which call for accelerated nuclear decay processes generating prodigious amounts of heat, heat which needs to be dissipated extremely rapidly.

The issue includes two essay book reviews. Robert Prevost examines how revelation as a category may affect not just theology, but philosophy as well. Bethany Sollereder evaluates four recent books under the rubric of "God and Evolution."

I trust you will also enjoy reading the fifteen book reviews and one book notice authored by a diversity of reviewers. The issue closes with three letters (two of which are an exchange) written in response to articles previously published in *PSCF*.

Again, let me remind you that the quality of the journal is a reflection of the evaluative work done by our band of trusty referees. Please keep your manuscripts coming. We could certainly use more exemplars of your wisdom and insight! ☙

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