

nection to religion. To be fair, some of these factors are acknowledged in passing by Hobart. He admits that changing attitudes toward the roles of religion and philosophy in the pursuit of natural knowledge were influenced by historical developments such as the rise of nominalism, the Reformation, Renaissance humanism, the revival of Platonism, gradual secularization, and so on, but these lie mostly outside the scope of his thesis. More importantly, Hobart does not probe the significant ways that Christian religion—in both its medieval and early modern versions—provided a hospitable intellectual environment in which modern science could develop and thrive, Galileo’s conflict with the church notwithstanding. Readers who recognize God as the author of nature (and of creation more broadly) will not be persuaded by Hobart’s allegation that “the deep incompatibility of religion and science” is now “simply too great to overcome” (p. 323). Distinct epistemic methodologies or information technologies do not automatically create territorial conflicts, and what discord there is, can often be attributed to other factors, such as the opposition between Christian faith and a strong commitment to naturalism.

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ORIGINS

KNOWING CREATION: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science by Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas H. McCall, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. 341 pages. Paperback; \$39.99. ISBN: 9780310536130.

The late modern unfurling of interdisciplinary studies continues to produce innumerable volumes. The relationship between theology and science is no exception. Zondervan recently released two volumes exploring “perspectives from theology, philosophy, and science,” edited by Andrew Torrance and Thomas McCall, each with over a dozen qualified contributors. The first is *Knowing Creation* and the second *Christ and the Created Order*. This review looks at the first.

As one skims the introduction, it seems the volume might be just another opinionated survey of the stale debates over “creation, science, and intelligent design.” But in reading through each chapter, it quickly becomes apparent that the book is far broader. In fact, readers generally interested in and familiar with this intersection of disciplines might find it a simple pleasure to read (as I did), without worrying about locating arguments within a contemporary context and making judgments. At any rate,

the book fulfills its purpose: to give a microphone to the multiplicity of dimensions in this arena, all without reducing or overemphasizing one aspect over another.

It is not possible to review each contribution, but I do want to highlight points from some of them to give readers a sample of the contents.

Christoph Schwoebel, in “We Are All God’s Vocabulary,” focuses on a topic vital for any discussion about interacting disciplines: language. Although many of us tend to think we understand basic concepts such as “metaphor” and “analogy,” we often don’t. “Metaphors do not simply add a coat of meaning to things which underneath remain what they are,” he writes. “They change the way things are for us and how we are to relate to them” (p. 49). In a modern age that privileges the literal, propositional, and measurable/quantifiable and downplays the symbolic, metaphorical, and qualitative (that is, “it’s just a metaphor”), getting a handle on the linguistic dimensions of the science-theology enterprise cannot be overstated.¹

Andrew Torrance, in “Not Knowing Creation,” attempts to clarify methodological naturalism. There’s much to comment on here, but the essay is more thoughtful and persuasive than those in *Theistic Evolution* (2017) edited by J. P. Moreland et al. on the same topic. Inevitably, there remain loose ends—especially with regard to the main assumptions of this discussion, such as models of God and creation, “special divine action,” and how science done by Christians is substantially different than that done by non-Christians. Torrance writes, for example, that “there should be a difference between the way in which the Christian scientist and the naturalistic scientist approach and interpret the structure, behavior, and history of the natural world” (p. 101); this view gets the ball rolling but does not take us too far.

John Walton, in “Origins in Genesis,” condenses some of his published research. In contrast to modern thought, he presses the superficiality of the natural/supernatural distinction. This default way of thinking simply is not part of biblical consciousness. “We cannot claim the Bible says something that makes no sense in the original context; it cannot make a categorical distinction if it does not have the categories” (p. 109). Walton is by no means the first to make this observation, but his repeated focus is justified given that many of those speaking and publishing on this topic still talk in ignorance; for instance, “miracles” are said to be part of the “supernatural” realm (that is, where God does stuff) in the Bible whereas “natural events” are said to be distinct and in the “nature

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world” (that is, where the “real world” happens). “Scientific claims, then, are typically premised on this metaphysical divide, with the idea that if a natural explanation can be offered, then any biblical claims about God’s involvement can be disregarded” (p. 108). In contrast, “When the Old Testament describes God’s extraordinary involvement in the world, it is not to specify a supernatural event that is in defiance of natural, scientifically describable cause and effect” (p. 110).

Francis Watson then answers the question, “How Did Genesis Become a Problem?” He challenges the stereotypes about “truth” types, as well as the false equivocation “literal = reality.”

It is true that Earth revolves on its own axis and around the sun, but it is also true that the sun rises and sets. To ascribe motion exclusively to Earth in one context does not make it false to ascribe motion exclusively to the sun in another. These are two distinct truths, not a single truth accompanied by a necessary fiction or a higher truth accompanied by a lower one ... In no circumstances ... is a literal interpretation obliged to demonstrate a direct and exclusive relationship between the text and the reality to which it refers. One can interpret the text literally without having to claim that, according to the Bible, the sun revolves around the earth. (pp. 129–30)

William Brown switches gears to a fascinating look at “Job and Astrobiology,” and Susan Eastman to an interesting discussion of “neurological mirroring” and the formation of identity as witnessed in Paul’s letters and ministry.

Marilyn Adams (who sadly passed away after submitting her contribution) writes on “Sanctifying Matter,” addressing the bigger philosophical contexts of God, creation, and meaning. This contribution alone made the book worth buying. I have never seen anyone so eloquently and concisely address the purpose of creation, meaning of life, problem of evil, death and hope, scientific reductionism, divine action and presence, God’s love, and wise living all within such a short space. But she pulls it off in beautiful prose and precision that will probably remain one of my all-time favorite essays in Christian theology.

Getting more technical, C. Stephen Evans answers the question “Are We Hardwired to Believe in God?” He challenges the late-modern/post-modern emphasis on epistemological construction and the arbitrariness of cognitive categories, asserting instead that “evolution actually shows that the order we experience on the surface of things, so to speak, depends on a still deeper, hidden order” (p. 207). Along the way, he tips over some common misunderstandings about

evolution and Christianity. “Atheists often seem to think that evolution and God are rival, mutually exclusive hypotheses about the origins of the natural world,” but this “fails to grasp the relationship between God and the natural world by conceiving of God as one additional cause within that natural world” (p. 208). Likewise, biological explanations for one human feature or another are not automatically reductionistic, hegemonic, or totalizing. “From an evolutionary perspective, all our cognitive faculties must have a biological explanation,” he argues. “The mere fact that a cognitive mechanism has an evolutionary explanation gives no reason to doubt that this mechanism is conducive to truth” (p. 211).

Robert Koons and William Simpson survey pertinent issues in ontology and metaphysics (for example, categories, reductionism, quantum theory, and materialism), with the latter making a philosophical case for transformative hylomorphism in contrast to emergentism and physicalist reductionism. Simpson concludes,

The transformative hylomorphists can agree with structured emergentists concerning the vanity of trying to reduce everything in biology, neuroscience, and psychology to fundamental physics but should reject both the reification of matter in terms of physical constituents and the identification of forms as structures with physical parts. (p. 258)

The variants of emergentism probably should have been given more attention.²

After two other excellent essays, Tom McLeish attempts to craft a summary of a theology of science: “Science is the participative, relational, cocreative work within the kingdom of God of healing the fallen relationship of humans with nature” (p. 320). Behind this is the assertion that “Science and theology are not complementary; they are not in combat, they are not just consistent – they are ‘of each other’” (p. 320).

Given the wide range and quality of writing in these contributions, one looks forward to the second volume with much anticipation. *Knowing Creation* is an excellent book for anyone interested in getting their feet wet with this complex subject.

Notes

¹Compare the recent publication, Paul Chilton and Monika Kopytowska, eds., *Religion, Language, and the Human Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), with my review in *Reading Religion*, Nov. 12, 2018, <http://readingreligion.org/books/religion-language-and-human-mind>.

²Note, for example, the qualifications offered in Jamin Hübner, “A Concise Theory of Emergence,” *Faith and Thought* 59 (October 2015): 2–17.

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