

THEOLOGY

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GOD'S GIFT OF SCIENCE: Theological Presuppositions Underlying Exploration of the Natural World by Graeme Finlay. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 156 pages. Paperback; \$22.00. ISBN: 9781666748062.

Graeme Finlay has had a long career as a cancer researcher and teacher of scientific pathology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Many different books have approached the very critical topic of science and faith over the last twenty years. Polling research has shown that one of the principal reasons that young people leave churches, and their faith, is due to a perceived conflict between these two. It is a topic that should concern us all, and it is very important that it be approached from a variety of perspectives.

The particular approach of Finlay is not predominantly as an academic expert in the history of science, nor as one who is principally interested in winning critical debate points in the science and faith dialogue, but as a scientist who has lived this out and deeply studied it at a personal level. Finlay links his understanding of science, including its history and philosophy, to the very nature and personality of God. One can sense the spiritual depths of his personal faith in his writings. The beauty of this book is that it brings a deep understanding of science and connects its deep mysteries with the nature and character of God. I have read and studied many books on the topic of science and faith, but have yet to see one presented in such an evidently personal way.

One could look at the book with a strictly academic eye and focus on missing arguments or insufficient detail in some of the reflections, but that would be to miss the point. At some level, we need to step back from the mountains of information and make the science/faith discussion real at the personal level, not just in our minds, but also in our hearts and in our own faith walk. That is the real value of this book.

Finlay's book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, "Science is Not Self-Sufficient," examines the nature and limits of science. He quotes Nietzsche,

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as science "without any presuppositions" ... a philosophy, a "faith" must always be there first, so that science can acquire from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a right to exist ... It is still a metaphysical faith that underlies our faith in science. (p. 11)

Finlay then himself states, "If we are to live truthfully, we should seek to discover the worldview that sustains and informs the scientific enterprise" (p. 11). This turns out to be the core truth that drives the entire book.

The second chapter, "One Source of Creation," relates science to the nature of God. God is almighty, wise, ordered, faithful, free, creative, holy, and redeeming. He speaks to us and is to be worshipped. Although each of these is treated as a small vignette, the sum total of the chapter makes the very significant point that science has emanated from, and is an integral part of, the very quality and character of God. The science that we observe and study is meant to bring us into relationship with him. This is the principal and most powerful contribution of this book.

Chapter three, "Science and the Nature of Humanity," outlines some of the social progress that has been brought about by people of faith. He relates this to humanity being made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and the biblical nature of work for the person of faith. He examines the elimination of slavery, as well as contributions to medicine and education/literacy. This part mostly reads as a historical examination of the influence of the Christian faith on social progress. I would have been very interested to see how he views the role of faith in more-contemporary topics of social discourse.

Chapter four, "The Death of Science," outlines how the author views the future of scientific endeavor in the absence of a strong spiritual faith foundation. He quotes Thorson, "If the age of science comes to an end, it will really be because people collectively have not cherished and sustained that practicing faith in the reality and authority of truth" (p. 64). Finlay is convinced of this and understands the "growing threats to science in deeply theological terms" (p. 64). He discusses the influence of powerful special interest groups, such as the tobacco industry's connection to cancer and the fossil fuel industry to climate change, as examples where strong commercial interests can undermine science. He is concerned that the moral underpinnings of science are weakening and that we need "to return to God on whose truth science is most securely founded" (p. 68).

Chapter five, "Discovery in Theology and Science: Surprise," is an attempt to relate scientific discovery to elements of surprise as seen in some passages in scripture. Although one can readily agree with the premise that the surprise of scientific discovery is related to the mystery of God, this part felt labored and did not really work in my opinion. The most interesting part of the chapter was the surprise/discovery he experienced in his own research on cancer drug research and how that relates to God.

Chapter six, "Science and Theology in Sustainability and Justice," is almost entirely an examination of the severe consequences and implications of climate change. This final chapter has the objective of bringing everything up to the modern day and underlines our responsibility to the planet as people of faith. Although this is well referenced and is interesting, it is surprising

that the author did not spend more time on his own scientific discipline—it would have been very interesting to have heard his insights about the future of cancer research, its impact on humanity, and the role of faith.

Finlay's book principally treats the question of why science needs faith, and that is done quite well. One part that was missing is the misunderstanding of science within the church itself, and the dangers that arise in faith communities when faith is dissociated from science. I would have loved to have heard some of his personal thoughts on this.

The book is highly footnoted, and the sources are quoted heavily. This significantly adds to the book, especially in the areas where Finlay is not an academic expert. Many of the references are not particularly recent, but I have come away with a list of books I want to read. Overall, this is an excellent book that will stimulate thinking in the area of science and faith and touch the reader's heart at the same time. I haven't marked up a book to this extent for a long time.

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PROVIDENCE AND SCIENCE IN A WORLD OF CONTINGENCY: Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics of Divine Action by Ignacio Silva. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2022. 170 pages. Paperback; \$52.95. ISBN: 9781032002781.

Ignacio Silva (DPhil, Oxford) is an Argentinian theologian who specializes in the dialogue between science and theology. This book is a proposal for fellow scholars and others to reconsider the contribution of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics as a means of resolving the question of divine action in the light of science. Although Aquinas is the thirteenth century's most famous friar and Catholicism's most renowned theological authority alongside Augustine, he is often viewed today as contributing few insights as regards an allegedly "modern" argument.

Silva argues that Aquinas supplies a way of getting beyond two mistaken views held by people today: (1) on the one hand, that God needs the natural world to be fundamentally open to outside influence; and (2) on the other hand, that God causes things to exist in a way that is similar to the way other natural causes cause things to occur.

Silva's goal is to get beyond the current situation in which "many today find it necessary to search for a lack of natural causation so as to find a space for God to act" (p. 139). According to this way of thinking, God's actions are only localized occasions, hence the school of

thought known as occasionalism. Conversely, another tendency is for believers to argue that God's powers are self-restricted in order to account for natural powers. The latter point of view is sometimes stipulated in terms of the biblical concept of *kenosis* ("Christ ... emptied himself," Phil. 2:7).

Silva's main point concerns a correct notion of causation such that we not restrict divine providence to an inadequate understanding of causation: "the idea of requiring insufficient causation for God to act depends on a deterministic notion of causation that, ultimately, renders God to act as a cause among causes" (p. 49). Silva holds that much causation is subject to chance contingencies. Thus, Silva's strategy is to think of causation in the context of potency and act. This allows a fresh and fuller way of dealing with the four parameters of divine providence: God's omnipotence, God's involvement with nature, nature's autonomy, and the success of science. The scope of the inquiry is enormous and Silva's handling of the thought of Thomas Aquinas is, unsurprisingly, difficult, yet hugely beneficial.

On the one hand, readers must be prepared for a dense tutorial in accounts of causality, powers, natures, and other metaphysical categories in order to appreciate the argument of this book. On the other hand, the argument over the relationship between God as the creating cause of the world and the secondary causes that act to create other effects in the world, is startlingly simple. It is best understood as a form of instrumental causality according to Silva. It is analogized (as so much of Aquinas's theology is) as follows:

The knife is moved by the man to cut, and to do it in such a manner. Without the man's power, the knife could not cut, but without the edge of the knife, the man could not cut in this manner ... the effect is both produced completely by God and by the natural agent ... (p. 129)

Thus, without God, nature would not have the necessary powers to cause the effects it possesses. Without those natural efficient causes, God's power could not be effective. There is no split between divine and natural causation in any given effect; both are completely causal of any given effect. It is analogically helpful, although Silva does not discuss this idea, to invoke here the Incarnation of Jesus Christ: he is both fully divine and fully human, not half of each.

God acts in three ways: through creation itself, through natural (secondary) causes, and through three types of miracles—although, sadly, the latter do not receive much attention in this book. But the threefold action of God is intended to counter, on the one hand, the view that causality is always deterministic and, on the other hand, that God's action in the universe endangers nature's autonomy.