

Russell bases his theology on a particular scientific model that may prove incorrect, a risky thing to do. However, this is not actually risky because most scientists accept a probabilistic view of quantum mechanics. Further, most theologians do not view miracles as divine violation of natural law, but more like a transcendence of natural law not grasped by our finite minds. Indeed, many questions arise from how God interacts with this world, including the problem of evil and suffering. Qureshi-Hurst rightly argues that any satisfactory view of providence should address such questions.

The fourth and fifth doctrines, incarnation and salvation, involve paradoxes such as how Jesus Christ could be both fully God and fully human, and whether God is temporal or atemporal, subject to time or outside it. Qureshi-Hurst argues that relativity theory favors the “block universe,” a four-dimensional space-time in which past, present, and future co-exist in spacetime, and that we only perceive time passing. This implies that salvation does not eliminate past sin, forcing us to accept only a subjective kind of salvation (something I disagree with). The author notes that many theologians continue to endorse the timeless view of God, which is hard to reconcile with a God who acts in time. She ends with a rather unfavorable impression of the compatibility of Christian doctrine with modern physics.

It is difficult to imagine clear answers to questions Qureshi-Hurst raises, but she does not seriously challenge Christian faith, which rests on more than scientific explanations. Although she is not personally persuaded that modern physics supports Christian faith, it is noteworthy that much of her discussion reveals Christian doctrine to be compatible with modern physics: creation and the big bang, design and the elegance and fine-tuning of the universe, and providence and the indeterminism of quantum theory. However, I suspect that her atheist vantage point sours her perspective on the tensions between faith and science. I would recommend the book only for those wanting to explore a skeptical view of the relationship between Christian doctrine and modern physics.

Notes

¹John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos & Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* (Crossword Publishing, 2005).

²Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, C. J. Isham, eds., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican Observatory and CTNS, 1993).

Reviewed by Steven Ball, Professor of Physics, LeTourneau University, Longview, TX 75602.

SCIENCE AND FAITH

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SOME NEW WORLD: Myths of Supernatural Belief in a Secular Age by Peter Harrison. Cambridge University Press, 2024. 482 pages. Paperback; \$39.99. ISBN: 9781009477246.

My students are routinely surprised when I explain that biblical authors and their audiences had no natural-supernatural distinction as we understand those terms. Their reaction demonstrates how we tend to read our modern conceptions back into the Old and New Testament worlds. Well-known scholar of science and religion Peter Harrison, in his latest work, thinks that this is a distinctly modern way of carving up the world. He documents his claim by detailing several elements that contribute to the formation of the modern natural-supernatural distinction.

Beginning with David Hume’s (1711–1776) arguments against miracles, Harrison argues for the “general thesis that the true foundations of modern naturalism lie not in philosophy or the logic of the natural sciences, but in tacit assumptions about historical progress and an accompanying hierarchy of cultures” (p. 14). Put another way, during the Enlightenment there was a growing prejudice against the veracity of earlier reports of miracles, drawing explicitly on racial and ethnic hierarchy to minimize, if not dismiss, such testimonies. For example, as Harrison notes, Enlightenment texts include phrases such as “ignorant and barbarous nations,” “ignorant and barbarous ancestors,” and “barbarous Arabians” (p. 16). Hume was no exception to this framing: “Unhappily, in his essay ‘Of National Characters’ Hume would ... remark, albeit in a footnote, on the intellectual inferiority of non-white peoples. Only among civilised white nations, Hume remarked, do we encounter excellence in action and speculation” (pp. 16–17).

Such prejudices remain with us, as Harrison documents. Contemporary arguments supporting naturalism trade on such dubious, if hidden, assumptions. Of course, these arguments do not make explicit reference to racial/ethnic hierarchies and denigration. Instead, these distasteful assumptions sneak in through the back door under the guise of “progress” (chap. 6). And once adopted, such assumptions sometimes become explicit. I concur with Harrison, evidenced in an example in Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (Penguin, 2006), in which he refers to atheists as “brights” in contrast to religious believers who, by implication, are not as intelligent.

A second feature of modern naturalism is the assumption that there are universal concepts and distinctions, such as “natural” and “supernatural,” or beliefs as rational assent to propositions, or religions as systems of beliefs. Harrison gives learned discussions of why these modern

Western ways of conceiving rationality and religion are far from universal or even the best way to understand spiritual and material realities in all their richness (chaps. 2, 3, and 5).

If our taken-for-granted conceptual apparatus for analyzing religious experience and practices turns out to be limited in applicability to religious cultures and their expressions, then naturalist arguments against God, miracles, and other spiritual realities are similarly limited in what they can possibly demonstrate. The dismissal of such spiritual realities on the part of naturalism looks more like uncritically assuming “the superiority of our conceptions of reality” than thoughtful, critical assessment and argument (p. 31).

A third feature of modern naturalism, widely shared within Christian circles, is the distinction between belief as intellectual assent to a proposition based on evidence (such as how Christianity is often described as a “system of beliefs”) versus trust or allegiance. Harrison has an extensive discussion of how faith is not treated as cognitive or intellectual assent but as trust in what has been proclaimed about God in Christ and allegiance to God for the first few centuries of the church’s existence.

In the original context, Christians trusted and lived into the *religare*—meaning to bind or re-tie—that united them with God, with each other, and with God’s good. It is later that *religare* gets transmuted into religion as a set of beliefs or doctrinal claims to which one must adhere (chaps. 2 and 3). In their early context, the creeds “are not so much assertions of some truth about the world as the performance of actions that bring into being a new state of affairs” (p. 46). The decrees bring into being a worshipping community as Christians proclaim their trust in the being and promises of the God of the Scriptures.

In continuity with the ancient Hebrews, Christians for the first few centuries of the church focused more on confidence in the biblical proclamation about God in Christ and that God would fulfill these promises. It was only in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that faith was divorced from belief and knowledge (chaps. 2–4). In modernity, belief and knowledge were transposed into an epistemological framework associated with justified true beliefs and disembodied ways of knowing. Modern naturalism makes much hay using this framework to argue there is no, or only inadequate, evidence for belief in God (i.e., belief in the proposition that God exists).

Contrasting with the modern natural-supernatural distinction, the term “supernatural” first arose in Aquinas’s discussion of how humans are naturally disposed toward “faith”—which he identifies as “trust”—versus what is a gift from God (p. 64). The distinction takes a decidedly modern turn in the 1800s into the two-tiered separated realms modernity assumes. This transition is fascinating

and has far-ranging consequences for how religious faith comes to be viewed in modern times (chaps. 5–7). Now Western societies struggle to conceive of the natural and supernatural as noncompeting causes or modes of activity. In premodern understanding, there is no firm distinction as it was considered “natural” that God works through the very properties and processes of creation to accomplish divine purposes without violating creation’s order.

Many science-faith conundrums could be alleviated by retrieving this older understanding. There is often a false forced choice between either God working apart from the properties and processes of creation, or nature’s processes proceeding apart from any divine influence whatsoever. However, the perspective of Psalm 104 offers an alternative: God working through creation’s functional integrity to minister to creation. For instance, “You let loose the springs in freshets/ among the mountains they go/ They water all beasts of the field,/ the wild asses slake their thirst (Ps. 104:10–11, Robert Alter, trans.).

The psalmist describes a pattern of creation’s operations, such as watering the mountains and beasts, while maintaining that it is God who does the watering and ministering. This pattern recalls that found in Genesis 1 (e.g., vv. 24–25). It is God and creation at work—God working through creation. No false forced choice between the supernatural and the natural. This is the perspective I strive to impart to my students, and *Some New World* gives me encouragement to continue. Although Harrison’s book is dense (there are footnotes on every page) and may try the reader’s patience at times, the richness of his account and analysis will reward the reader’s efforts.

Reviewed by Robert C. Bishop, John and Madeleine McIntyre Chair of Philosophy and History of Science, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187.

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DOES SCIENCE MAKE GOD IRRELEVANT? by Hans Madueme. Crossway, 2025. 84 pages. Paperback; \$8.99. ISBN: 9781433597992.

Hans Madueme, professor of theology at Covenant College, seeks to dismantle the perceived conflict between science and Christian faith for a conservative evangelical audience committed to the authority of Scripture. While he succeeds in challenging the popular “warfare” narrative and affirming the compatibility of science and faith, his theological framework ultimately constrains a fuller integration by subordinating scientific inquiry to a rigid doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The author’s goal in writing the book is for young Christians to see that science and evangelical faith can be taken seriously, and that they are intimate friends. He organizes the book around four areas: (1) debunking the