one simply must take on liberal religious beliefs to be more open to science.

Ultimately, Christian scientists, laypeople, ministers, atheists, agnostics, and practitioners of non-Christian religions gain a better understanding of the landscape of science and religion in American society by reading *Religious Belief and Science*. It may prove useful for classroom settings, particularly undergraduate or graduate level courses in philosophy, political science, American history, theology, and religious studies.

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Physics

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DECODING THE COSMOS: God, Physics, and the Search for Deeper Explanation by Emily Qureshi-Hurst. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2025. 188 pages. Hardcover; $42.00. ISBN: 9781666785661.

Reminiscent of *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?* by Michael Ruse (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Emily Qureshi-Hurst, philosopher of religion and science at the University of Cambridge and self-declared atheist, neither affirms that science and faith are compatible nor that they are incompatible. *Decoding the Cosmos* is a summary of her reflections on how major Christian doctrines can be addressed by contemporary physics, drawing upon her engagement with respected theologians and scientists. She regrets the unfortunate hostility that has grown out of the harsh rhetoric from New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins. Having studied under Alister McGrath, she respects how scientists can have an intellectually sound sense that science is compatible with Christian faith. However, it seems odd that an atheist would have so much interest in this topic, especially since her audience is primarily Christian. Although I, as an evangelical Christian, agree with many of her assertions, I have significant objections on a few important ones.

The structure of the book is based on concepts central to Christianity: creation, design, providence, incarnation, and salvation. Qureshi-Hurst limits her scientific discussion to developments in modern physics that have implications for how we view these doctrines. Her introduction lays a foundation for an orthodox Christian faith position. However, she warns readers that today's concept of belief is not necessarily one that has always been held and that, to examine the intersection of physics and Christianity, we must rely on contemporary Western theology. This leads her to specify four catchy categories of the science-faith relationship: conflict, contrast, complementary, and complexity, the latter one arising from unclear definitions of each. She suggests that conflicts are typically between personalities, not necessarily between science and faith.

On the doctrine of creation, Qureshi-Hurst makes the strongest case for compatibility with modern physics. God is described as a necessary being who created a contingent universe. She focuses on two interpretive communities: young earth creationism (YEC) and old earth creationism (OEC). Big bang cosmology firmly establishes a cosmos that is about 13.8 billion years old. This conflicts with YEC, which relies on a literal reading of Scripture, concluding that the cosmos is only a few thousand years old. But the author points out that faith does not have to be this way. She groups all Christians who allow for some symbolic reading of the creation account in the OEC camp and then makes a case for compatibility between OEC and modern physics. I was disappointed that she does not differentiate concordist and non-concordist approaches to interpreting Genesis 1; yet overall, she stresses that the doctrine of creation can agree beautifully with prevailing scientific understandings that imply a moment of creation.

On the doctrine of design, Qureshi-Hurst takes on the teleological claim that nature exhibits intelligible design that points to a Creator. She argues that the debate has shifted away from the kind of design challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution via natural selection to a consideration of cosmic fine tuning. Following the weak anthropic principle (the universe must exhibit life-friendly tuning, or we wouldn't be here to observe it), Qureshi-Hurst suggests that the multiverse hypothesis is a compelling explanation for design. She offers an analogy, proposing two explanations for garden vegetables disappearing: a ghost coming at night to spirit them away or squirrels coming to eat them. The latter is more plausible, since we have observed squirrels. Thus, since we are familiar with universes, namely our own, the multiverse explanation is more plausible. This is a flawed analogy, in my opinion. Familiarity with squirrels is not analogous to familiarity with universes, since we are familiar with only one of the latter. I find the argument that simplicity favors a Creator over a multitude of unobserved universes more compelling, although I am aware of several Christian physicists who favor both a multiverse and a Creator.

With the doctrine of providence, Qureshi-Hurst shows more nuance. A personal God would not only create and sustain the universe but would also be active in the lives of humans. Historically, the scientific revolution raised questions about miracles and divine violation of natural law. Even John Polkinghorne, though fully accepting miracles, agreed that God does not act against himself.[1] He and fellow theologian and physicist Robert Russell proposed differing ideas to allow for miracles in a universe governed by God-ordained natural laws. Russell argues for non-interventionist objective divine action, which relies on the probabilistic interpretation of quantum mechanics, in which uncertainty is built into the microscopic realm,[2] whereas Polkinghorne appeals to chaos theory as a way around this dilemma. Qureshi-Hurst finds both approaches problematic; she claims that

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

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

[2]Robert 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).

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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