

Reviews

Jesus and Creativity. By GORDON D. KAUFMAN. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.
xiii + 142 pages. \$20.00.

As I was reading Gordon D. Kaufman's *Jesus and Creativity* I was reminded of one of the most significant things I read in theological school, Rudolf Bultmann's 1941 essay that called for the "demythologizing" of the New Testament. Bultmann's thinking at the time was groundbreaking. He set forth the idea that the Christian gospel was originally expressed in a "mythical world view," and this worldview was not the gospel and actually got in the way of encountering the Christian message today. The New Testament needed to be demythologized so that the Christian good news could speak to the existential situation of twentieth-century human beings. Yet, to my mind, Bultmann did not go far enough. He held on to one important idea that to me is part of the mythical worldview—that of God as personal agent. In this regard Kaufman's *Jesus and Creativity* may be more significant for us today than Bultmann's work was more than sixty years ago.

In *Jesus and Creativity* (and in other recent books) Kaufman puts forth a position that fully demythologizes the traditional Christian gospel. He argues that for people who live with a scientifically grounded view of the world, God is best conceived nonanthropomorphically as the mysterious serendipitous creativity that is universally present in the origin and ongoing evolution of the universe, biological life, and human history. In Jesus this creativity takes on a new modality, a specifically human form that inaugurates a historical trajectory of *agape* love, the inspiring power and example of which comes down through the centuries and provides for people today—Christians and others—a radical vision for responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Assuming a naturalistic worldview grounded in contemporary science, and assuming the approach to history of modern scholarship, *Jesus and Creativity* offers a companion volume to Kaufman's previous book *In the beginning. . . Creativity* (Fortress, 2004). In that book he holds that understanding God as a humanlike agent is not intelligible for many. Instead, the term *God* should be understood as a symbol of creativity—of the coming into being of the new in all phases of the evolving universe. Creativity (God) is a symbol for the mysterious ground of the origin of the universe, for its ongoing evolution that leads to the emergence of life and all its forms, and for the creativity among humans as they construct the universe story from scientific facts and theory. Creativity should be called God because, Kaufman argues, it is the ultimate point of reference in terms of which our lives should be oriented.

With the same assumptions (the naturalism grounded in science and the approach of historical scholarship) Kaufman constructs in *Jesus and Creativity* a Christology—an understanding of the meaning of Jesus for people today. He does this in four chapters. Central is Kaufman's idea that creativity gives rise to new trajectories. This has occurred countless times in the history of the universe. Each new star, or species of life on earth, or human society that is created has a history; this history is its trajectory through time. Each trajectory may, insofar as it is involved with creativity, give rise to further trajectories. A religion, for example, as it develops may give rise to different movements—trajectories—within the religion.

Chapter 1, "Reconceiving the Jesus-trajectory," develops two trajectories, two historically evolving ways of thinking about who Jesus is and what he accomplished. Both are based on the life and teachings of Jesus, his death, and the mysterious events that led to the belief in his resurrection. The first (which Kaufman calls Jesus-trajectory₁) gives rise to that which many today see as the traditional understanding of Jesus. It develops in four distinct conceptual steps: (1) Jesus' baptism by John, leading to his ministry of preaching and teaching about the coming kingdom of God and performing healings and his crucifixion; (2) the emergence of the beliefs among his followers that he had been raised from the dead; (3) the belief that he was the incarnation of God on earth; and (4) the church's development of the doctrine of the Trinity, in which the Son (Jesus Christ) has equal divine status with the God Father and the Holy Spirit. This trajectory assumes a dualism of the natural and supernatural, so that the person Jesus becomes divinized and understood to be fully God and fully human and thus is the mediator between human beings and God, saving humans from sin and promising eternal life.

The second trajectory (Jesus trajectory₂) assumes modern historical scholarship and the idea of God as creativity and therefore rejects the supernaturalistic and dualistic context of Jesus-trajectory₁. It portrays Jesus as the emergence of a new form of creativity (God). Although the creativity throughout the universe is not always good for human affairs, it has produced a trajectory in biological and human history that has given rise to Jesus as a model of how humans should live in order to humanely survive and flourish. Of course creativity also has produced normative ways of human living in other cultures and traditions. But for Christians, Jesus offers a new understanding of what it is to be human.

This understanding is developed in Chapter 2, "Jesus the Norm." Jesus is the norm in two ways. First, he provides the radical ethic of *agape* love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Kaufman argues that the story of this love in the life and death of Jesus and in its continuation among his earliest followers has the power to capture the minds and hearts of many. These people then decide to do what Jesus would do, to live as Jesus would live, as the primary way to orient their lives. Further, the love Jesus exemplifies is much needed in our pluralistic world today, a world being brought together by scientific technologies that at the same time provide increasingly powerful weapons of destruction.

Second, Jesus is the norm in that he provides a new way of understanding God. The biblical narrative gives us a historically developing understanding of God from a tribal warrior and lawgiver to the universal creator of the world and ruler of all nations. The way Jesus lived and died focuses on a further develop-

ment of this understanding—namely, that God is love. In Kaufman's narrative of God as creativity, Jesus offers a new development so that God becomes the activity of creative love. Yet, for Kaufman it would be a mistake to project this new development back onto the wider cosmic and biological creativity. To do so would be to anthropomorphize the creativity of the universe. For this reason, Kaufman argues that the idea of the Trinity, a construction of the nature of God in Jesus trajectory₁, is no longer viable, because such a construction projects what is of ultimate significance in the human realm onto the prehuman cosmos. Instead, Jesus is truly a new cultural, evolutionary development of creativity (God). In Jesus, creativity (God) grows or evolves into an indiscriminating, sacrificial love for all the world.

Two of the underlying ideas in Kaufman's book are the idea of God as creativity and the idea of historical trajectories. In Chapter 3, Kaufman employs these ideas in his discussion of "Humans as Biohistorical Beings: Historicity, Creativity, and Freedom." He addresses the question of why humans have developed complex symbol systems, including such symbols as God and Jesus (for Christians). Humans develop such symbols because we have evolved—have been serendipitously created—to be biohistorical beings. On the one hand, we are rooted in our biology and the rest of the natural world, and survive only as we live in harmony with it. On the other hand, we have coevolved through the interactions between language and brain (as argued by Terrence Deacon) to have brains capable of being self-conscious agents, free in the sense of being able to partly direct our own history, and thereby capable of being responsible for our actions. As historically created as well as biologically evolved agents we also are capable of being intentionally creative in concert with the wider serendipitous creativity that has brought us into being.

Historicity, agency, and creativity are for Kaufman a living triad that is the mark of both individual human beings and human societies. And with historicity, agency, and creativity comes responsibility. To help exercise this responsibility humans have, through serendipitously creative interactions with one another, developed moral and religious systems. These systems in the past have provided both knowledge of the world and norms by which to live. Today modern science gives us more accurate knowledge of our world than ever before. However, this knowledge needs to be combined with religious and moral vision about how we should live. It is this guiding vision that symbols such as God (creativity throughout the universe) and Jesus (creativity in *agape* love) provide for those who choose to follow this path.

In the final chapter, "Creativity Is Good News," Kaufman elaborates how the Jesus portrayed in Jesus trajectory₂ can offer guidance for living today. He first reviews the Jesus story and reiterates that the stream of creativity coming forth from Jesus gave rise to a new vision of life and a new understanding of God as it spawned magnificent music and art and stimulated philosophical, moral, and theological reflection. Of course, Kaufman acknowledges, this creativity also was used by Christians for their own ends in destructive ways. Next he offers how human biohistorical creativity is bringing about a new global yet pluralistic society, even as it is being restricted by nationalism and economic self-interest. Further human creativity has brought about two challenges that threaten to end the human story: the nuclear bomb and ecological crises.

The question is, then, What does the creativity coming forth from Jesus offer as guidance for Christians today (not discounting that creativity is also at work in other religious and secular trajectories)? Kaufman first says that the wider, universal creativity is operative in all cultures throughout the world, prompting a worldwide conversion or transformation. He then lifts up the radical naturalistic-humanistic vision of the Jesus of trajectory₂ that calls Christians to participate in this wider creativity by living out Jesus' call to *agape* love—a call to love God, neighbor, and enemy. The radical themes of the story/image of Jesus demand, he writes, “the transvaluation of our generally accepted values” that underlie living in terms of power, injustice, and consuming the environment to a life of reconciliation, service, love, and peace among humans and with our natural world” (p. 114). This is the message of *Jesus and Creativity*.

While the summary I have written covers the main themes of Kaufman's book, it does not do justice to all of the insights that I found as he developed his major ideas. It is amazing what Kaufman accomplishes and then further suggests in this short book (114 pages of primary text). Several times as I was reading I hoped for more development of some subordinate idea. For example, I would like to have read more on how Jesus trajectory₂ unfolded in Christian history, especially before the modern period. I suspect that aspects of Kaufman's own Mennonite tradition are a part of this trajectory, as is Abelard's thirteenth-century moral exemplar theory of atonement and even earlier Christian thought. Likewise, I would like to have seen more on the relation of human creativity to God as creativity, to how intentionality shapes human creating but not the serendipitous creativity throughout the universe prior to humans. Kaufman sets human intentional creativity always in the context of the wider creativity, God. But how, more exactly, do these interface? From my own work I have come to think that humans are creative as they participate in divine creativity, and a part of this participation is letting go of one's intentions and being willing to have one's objectives serendipitously transformed by the wider creativity (God). Issues such as these suggest that Kaufman's book provides much fertile ground for some of the rest of us to carry his kind of naturalistic-historical theological reflection forward.

One final issue that I think provides an opportunity for fruitful exploration is the relation of contemporary religious thinking that is done in the context of modern science to the older thinking of religious traditions. Often, it is assumed that the current thinking is the most advanced and that older forms of religious thought are outdated and just plain wrong. Sometimes there is not much appreciation for the religious thinking of our ancestors. And Bultmann's demythologizing of the Jesus gospel (good news) from the mythical worldview to that of modern existentialist thought also can imply a devaluing of the ways of thought at the time of Jesus. Kaufman's naturalistic, evolutionary, and historical approach suggests that devaluing older ways of thought may be misguided. Even though he strongly argues against humanlike concepts of the divine and against metaphysical dualism and supernaturalism, he also expresses appreciation for the historical role these have played in the rise of Christianity. More than once in *Jesus and Creativity* he suggests that without the deification of Jesus in Jesus trajectory₁, the radical love ethic of Jesus may not have taken hold as it did.

Along with *In the beginning . . . Creativity*, Kaufman's *Jesus and Creativity* deserves to be widely read. It breaks new ground as a Christology that relates the

saving activity of Jesus to the activity of God understood nonpersonally as creativity, so that in Jesus, creativity (God) emerges into a new modality of creative, *agape* love. It is the light of this love that can guide Christians and non-Christians alike (and traditional and modern thinkers alike) as together we creatively seek to address the challenges we face, so that human civilization can survive in a sustainable, just, and peaceful manner in harmony with the rest of our planet.

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The Ethical Brain. By MICHAEL S. GAZZANIGA. New York and Washington, D.C.: Dana Press, 2005. 232 pages. \$25.00.

During a recent morning talk-radio show, the host questioned a prominent neuroscientist about the possibility of making judges and juries superfluous by using neuroscientific scans. Asking the appropriate questions would activate specific areas of the brain allowing us to assert the truth in the suspect's intentions, regardless of the given answers. Naturally, the interviewed neuroscientist acknowledged that it would not be that simple. However, we might safely assume that a majority of the wider population has the same assumption as the host.

There is a growing field in contemporary society whose inferences follow this line of logic, even though its details are extensively esoteric. It goes by the name *neuroethics*, and its meaning follows its etymology: ethical implications from neuroscience. The esteemed neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga has written an introductory book, *The Ethical Brain*, spelling out the field of neuroethics and dealing with many of the issues popular in today's society, including suspect culpability. This book is timely because there is no doubt that as the sciences of the brain continue to advance, repercussions for society will be inevitable.

As the director of the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at Dartmouth College and a member of the U.S. president's council on bioethics, Gazzaniga's is a voice worth listening to. He covers the major themes that arise at the intersection between societal configurations, especially legal systems, and achievements in the scientific community. These themes include concerns relating to the beginning of life (a central issue in discussions associated with abortion and stem-cell research), the societal consequences from genetic alteration and engineering, the long-debated free will versus determinism question, and the relationship between an individual's rights and brain imaging techniques.

As befits an introductory book, Gazzaniga explores the prominent and important issues. For instance, he devotes a section of the book to the nature and variety of brain enhancement possibilities. He explores topics such as parental choice in various offspring characteristics, including variables such as sex, intelligence, and disease avoidance. Gazzaniga does a nice job of emphasizing the complexity involved with such issues. He asks, for instance, if it is even feasible to believe in our ability to genetically manipulate a child's intelligence when it seems likely that intelligence involves more than just genes. Asking such a question is his way of showing that the science is still incomplete but also a way of preempting the