

Reviews

Religion-and-Science as Spiritual Quest for Meaning. Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Goshen Conference on Religion and Science. By Philip Hefner. Edited by Carl S. Helrich. Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2008. 127 pages. \$17.50 Canadian.

The book contains three lectures and a “Coda” delivered by Philip Hefner, a homily by Frank Scardiglia, and a discussion that took place at a conference in Goshen, Indiana, in March of 2006.

In his lectures, Hefner proposes a concept of religion-and-science to address the human ability to fuse elements of their religious faith and the scientific understanding of the world in the process of the search for meaning. That concept seems to have helped Hefner to fuse his own Christian faith with his understanding of cosmology and genetics. Hefner’s goal is to offer other American Christians a concept that would allow them to accept science without rejecting their faith and keep their faith without rejecting the scientific interpretations of natural reality. Hefner shapes that concept using his own Lutheran religious tradition and his knowledge of modern science. Through his lectures and the discussion he clarifies the fundamental concepts employed in his presentation, such as religion, religiosity, theology, spirituality, knowledge, science, and technology. In the discussion, he also clarifies his understanding of community, culture, values, and hybridity.

Hefner is a theologian who prefers the concept of religion over theology when he discusses the relationship between religion and science. Theology is limited to a specific category of people while religion is accessible to all. He also prefers to talk about science rather than technology. Medical biotechnology is again only in the hands of the few, while all members of our society are influenced by the scientific approach to reality. For example, young couples become educated about the biological and medical aspects of parenthood in the doctor’s office. However, in spite of the coexistence of religion and science in our society, quite often religious and scientific interpretations of the origins of the universe and of species are perceived as contradictory.

Hefner maintains that the human spiritual quest for meaning is an effort to answer three ultimate questions: Where did we come from? What should we do? Where are we going? The most important question is the middle one, the moral question, but the answer to that one depends on the answers to the other two. In his interpretation of morality Hefner makes a leap from human biology to culture, disregarding the key link between the two that is constructed of a complex web of social interactions between social beings. Society is a powerful structure that creates values and allows people to interpret them in a variety of ways depending on a specific context. Intentional killing of a neighbor is murder, but the execution of a murderer may still be viewed as a legitimate application of capital

punishment, and so forth. Therefore, social positions, social roles, and social interactions need to be accounted for in any interpretation of the relationship between religion and science. Society creates all elements of culture, but the interpretations of those elements differ and give rise to communities that accept one interpretation and reject another. (Another important distinction that would help in this discussion is between spontaneous and intentional social and cultural changes, including hybridization.)

The discussion that follows Hefner's lectures is devoted to: Thoughts, Science, Religion, Ethics, Human Values, and Spiritual Quest. The individuals asking questions or offering comments are identified by their background or expertise, and Hefner has edited his responses, in which he clarifies the concepts and ideas presented earlier.

This publication reflects an attempt by Hefner to clarify his proposed concept of religion-and-science and invite his readers to further reflect on the process of a spiritual quest for meaning.

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Ultimate Explanations of the Universe. By Michael Heller. Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2009. 216 pages. \$69.95.

Professor Michael Heller is a famous Polish physicist, cosmologist, philosopher, and theologian. This, his latest book, may be deeply inspirational for a reader struggling to answer questions about the universe and its origins.

The introductory first chapter deals with the quest for an ultimate explanation of the origins and function of the universe. The author observes that every scientist has natural aspirations to grasp and know reality in the best possible way. Cosmology cannot go beyond empirically based methods for explaining the universe. However, because cosmology in a sense talks about a whole, this adds a new perspective of seeing things "from the outside" and consequently allows for dissertations metaphysical or even theological in nature. The "ultimate explanations" thus require drawing the boundaries of the method used by a scientist at the particular moment.

In the first part, "Models," Heller presents groups of cosmological models built in accordance with the achievements of relativistic cosmology, inflationary cosmology, and quantum cosmology. He considers them in the context of the question about the origins of the world. The presentation of contemporary cosmological models dealing with the genesis of the universe informs the reader not only of the condition of recent research conducted by cosmologists but also of their main aim—that is, producing a coherent cosmological theory. Moreover, Heller makes an effort to single out the philosophical level present in the given cosmological theories that the model creators draw on. According to Heller, the special care so as not to overstep the competencies of cosmology as an empirical science is a postulate that has still been taken for granted by cosmologists.

In the second part, "Anthropic Principle and Other Universes," Heller raises the issue of multiple universes, whose existence is acceptable according to some