

Reviews

The Grand Design. By Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow. New York: Bantam Books, 2010. 208 pages. \$28.00.

This slender volume with the name of a world-famous physicist as the first author is delightful reading. A good chunk of the book incorporates standard physics course material, minus the mathematics, somewhat like a vegetarian meat loaf. Interwoven are popular expositions of M-theory and Feynman physics. The authors' goal is to disabuse the reader of the God-concept as an explanation for the world, and to prove that *ex nihilo* emergence, contrary to common sense and Lucretius, is not impossible.

The book starts with the tenet: "WE EACH EXIST FOR BUT A SHORT TIME" (5). It reminds us of how we are intrigued by our appearance from nowhere, and promises to dispel that mystery. It says, "Just as there is no flat map that is a good representation of the Earth's entire surface, there is no single theory that is a good representation of observations in all situations" (8). This quote sounds like an echo of an ancient Hindu sage-poet of 3,500 years ago: the truth about it all is one, but described in countless ways.

Then the concept and history of nature's laws are discussed. By declaring that "Ignorance of nature's ways led people in ancient times to invent gods to lord it over every aspect of human life" (17), revelations and messages from archangels are ruled out. Next follows an account of reality and reality models: a grand sweep covering a handful of Western philosophers from Ptolemy to the moderns. Ultimately, as M-theory tells us, "The universe does not have just a single existence or history, but rather every possible version of the universe exists simultaneously in what is called a quantum superposition" (58–59). This idea is expounded with commendable clarity, with no mathematics, but with color pictures. The point is, what Feynman said about electrons hitting the double slit is applicable to the whole universe: "the universe doesn't have just a single history, but every possible history, each with its own probability. . ." Next we get in a nutshell the Theory of Everything (TOE). Here, we get glimpses of Maxwell's equations, the Michelson-Morley experiment, QED, renormalization, quarks, and more, all without one algebraic symbol. One wonders how many of the millions who buy the book will form even a nebulous notion of any of this material, though they may be amused to learn that Feynman was good at bongo. This chapter concludes with another reference to M-theory, with the admission that "No one seems to know what the M stands for, but it may be master, miracle, or mystery. It seems to be all the three" (117). The M-for-membrane origin is not even mentioned. We are told in passing that "M-theory allows for some 100^{500} sets of apparent laws" (119). Thus, anything is possible, so why not existence?

The no-God-needed refrain is what prompted headlines in the popular press, though this is implicit in every theory and textbook in physics. In a chapter entitled *Apparent Miracle*, one learns about stellar evolution and the anthropic principle, weak and strong, and recognizes that "Our very existence imposes rules

determining from where and at what time it is possible for us to observe the universe” (153).

The word *design* in *The Grand Design* may not be the best choice for an atheistic treatise. The book is good because even those who experience mirth and music, joy and jubilation, compassion and consolation, and spirituality from religions may like to know about the visions formed in rational minds when they peer through the scientific lens. People beyond the ivory tower get some idea of how the universe appears through the scientific spyglass.

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Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science. Edited by Thomas Jay Oord. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2009. VII + 272 Pages. \$26.95.

What happens when Open Theology engages the natural and social sciences? Not even God knows—at least not in advance, if the open theologians are correct in their analysis of divine foreknowledge. However the future may unfold, this book now invites the reader into the contemporary conversation among advocates of open theism as they encounter modern science. The essays collected here result from conferences held in 2007 and 2008, in which Thomas Jay Oord convened a group of evangelical colleagues to confer with leading thinkers in religion and science; the resulting essays are quite varied but address common theological concerns including human freedom and agency, divine knowledge and power, and the problems of suffering and evil for an open theism that affirms the conviction that “God is love.”

Part One gathers contributions concerned with “Creation, Cosmology, and an Open God.” In “The Earth Is Not a Planet,” Karen Strand Winslow clears the ground for evangelical dialogues with evolutionary science by placing the biblical narratives of creation in their proper context of ancient Hebrew cosmology. Michael Lodahl examines “The (Brief) Openness Debate in Islamic Theology”—in which the Muʿtazilite School of medieval Muslim theologians argued against divine determinism and for human agency—and makes a case for “why that debate should be different among contemporary Christians.” In “Reality and the Primary Mind,” Brint Montgomery draws inspiration from Anaxagoras to propose a conception of the God-world relation that he terms “nouentheism.” An especially valuable contribution is “Rethinking Divine Presence and Activity in World Process,” in which Anna Case-Winters engages thinkers such as Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Jürgen Moltmann, and Gordon Kaufman on the particulars of panentheism; her sustained study of Alfred North Whitehead notes important connections and subtle distinctions between process theology and open theology.

Part Two focuses on “Evolution and the Open God.” Here, Clark Pinnock reflects on “Evangelical Theology after Darwin,” showing how taking evolution seriously sheds new light on traditional doctrines of God, providence, theodicy, anthropology, and eschatology. In “The Goodness of Creation and the Openness of God,” Craig Boyd defends the essential goodness of nature as divine creation while denying that this would require a static perfection at odds with the dynamic and often distressing story of life told by modern evolutionary biology. Another Boyd—Gregory—dwells more darkly on nature’s imperfections in “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare,” arguing that what is commonly taken to be “natural evil” is in fact a manifestation of the malevolent supernatural powers so vividly portrayed in the New Testament.

In Part Three, two theologians explore the question of God’s foreknowledge—the issue over which open theologians have differed most sharply with traditional evangelicals—in the context of scientific theories that raise epistemological challenges. Alan Rhoda advocates more sophisticated metaphors for God’s foreknowledge and benevolence in “Beyond the Chess Master Analogy: Game Theory and Divine Providence,” suggesting that God plays a “creation game” made complex, meaningful, and beautiful by free agents taking real risks. Alan Padgett asks “Does Heisenberg Uncertainty Apply to God?” and concludes that “God does not have a measurement problem.”

Part Four, “Open God and Open Humanity,” addresses anthropomorphic and more broadly relational models of God in the context of the human and social sciences. In “The Final Form of Love,” Richard Rice surveys current research on forgiveness in interpersonal and political relations and reflects on “the science of forgiveness and the openness of God.” John Sanders explores “how human embodiment shapes discourse about God,” considering the cognitive linguistics of image schemas and metaphors we use for space, time, and divinity. Dean Blevins explores “Emergence and Transformation” as matters of practical theology in conversation with the work of Paul Markham, Nancey Murphy, and Philip Clayton. However, readers of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* may be surprised by Blevins’ dubious claim that this journal neglects the social sciences.

In his own essay, “An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation and Solution to the Problem of Evil,” Oord articulates a model of divine creation from a chaotic cosmos as against the classical tradition of *creatio ex nihilo*. He further argues for an open theodicy (here meaning an open theist’s response to the “theoretical” aspect of the problem of evil) based on what he calls “essential kenosis”: the intrinsically self-giving character of God’s love, rather than a voluntary self-limitation as proposed in the kenotic theology of Nancey Murphy and George Ellis or a metaphysically necessary self-limitation as argued by most process theologians. Readers interested in pursuing a full development of Oord’s notion of essential kenosis will enjoy his more recent *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010). Like most of the contributors to *Creation Made Free*, Oord writes from the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions (Oord is Professor Theology at Northwest Nazarene University and is an ordained minister in the Church of the Nazarene); on this theological tradition, readers may also wish to consult Oord’s *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation: Wesleyan Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2009). Well organized and edited, *Creation*

Made Free offers a fascinating introduction to open theology and a promising “opening” to evangelical engagement with science.

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Theology, Psychology, and the Plural Self. By Léon Turner. Ashgate Science and Religion Series. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008. X + 227 Pages. \$99.95.

When one looks at both contemporary and historical theological studies, the “healthy self” has most often been viewed as a “unified self” (p. 3). With the advent of scientific research presenting the self as a plurality of “selves,” this traditional theological conception has come into question. In *Theology, Psychology and the Plural Self*, Léon Turner attempts to bridge this gap and open room for future dialogue between theology and science. Turner is currently a Senior Research Associate/Teaching Officer (Divinity Subgroup) at the Psychology and Religion Group, University of Cambridge (<http://www.prrg.org/prrg/people/staff/staff.acads?context=1609849&instanceid=1849966>).

The author lays groundwork for building a stronger foundation between psychology and theology by attempting to show that theological frameworks that require the unity of personhood are not mutually exclusive with current psychological research. This text is but a beginning, urging readers that the divide over the self is not insurmountable. Turner begins by introducing the study, followed by a lengthy discussion of the psychological matter on the plural self, which encompasses three chapters (chapters 2–4). This is followed by two chapters covering theological interpretations of the self (chapters 5–6), looking specifically at the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Alistair McFadyen. He concludes with a brief overview of the study and a call to future work based upon the establishment of the idea that “[a] divided self is not always a troubled self” and hence psychological narrative approaches to the self can be useful for theologians (pp. 179, 186). He goes on, “if self-multiplicity can co-exist in harmony with personal continuity, then multiplicity itself no longer carries such an existential threat” (p. 186).

To bring his argument into clearer focus, Turner argues for an “approach to self-multiplicity that” in accord with many others “is one in which no central processor exists”—the sub-personalities of a person do not have a central “dictator” to which they report (p. 111). The author attempts to strike a balance between the modern approaches to the self, which tend to be individualistic, and postmodern, which can seemingly lead to a lack of unity (p. 119). To condense the argument, I see him presenting the following: (1) Theology has tended to focus on the unity of the self. (2) Postmodern psychology affirms the plurality of the self. (3) Theologians cannot accept this plurality because they see it as pathology (in Pannenberg, for example, p. 158). (4) Postmodern descriptions of narrative identity allow for a healthy continuous self to endure in the reality of multiple plural selves over a person’s lifetime (one example of narrative cohesion of the self is S. E. Braude’s

description on pp. 102–103). (5) Thus, the singular self can be maintained within the reality of the plural self, giving theologians a starting point to engage the most current psychological developments. Therefore, in essence, Turner is leveling the playing field for theologians and psychologists where some may have seen an impasse up till this point of time.

To summarize, Turner has presented a solid text that will offer a starting point for theologians to re-enter engagement with the psychological realm as regards the singular/plural self. The volume is fairly dense, and familiarity with the work of Pannenberg and McFadyen and current psychological research regarding the plural self will be of great benefit. The author has provided an opening for further dialogue between theology and the psychological sciences in a way that will benefit future interaction between the two fields where some may have previously seen a stoppage. This, in itself, is a much-needed achievement.

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Science and Religious Anthropology: A Spiritually Evocative Naturalist Interpretation of Human Life. By Wesley J. Wildman with a Foreword by Philip Clayton. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. XXIII + 270 Pages. \$89.95.

Wesley J. Wildman is an Associate Professor in the Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics Department of Boston University's School of Theology. "Religion," as Wildman defines it, means simply that which gives meaning to our lives and binds us to our commitments. That "meaning" comes from human nature and our experiences in life. Wildman propounds a strict naturalism that eschews all super-naturalistic and supra-naturalistic beings and processes of explanation and keeps our attention closely focused on earthly realities as described by natural and social sciences. However, Wildman wants to engage the world's religions because they hold a wealth of wisdom and insight into human being, and offer the comfort and guidance religious ideas provide. The religious naturalist approach is able "to speak of religious experiences as genuine events of encounter or engagement without prejudging the nature of that which is encountered or engaged, except to say that it is the Whence of the encounter, the Logical Object of the engagement, and rooted somehow in the valuational, meaning-laden deep structures and dynamics of nature. [Note the surprising use of capitalization here; also note that nature here probably means human nature rather than nature in the mountains or on a coral reef, just as natural responses (in what follows) mean specifically those of humans.] This allows us to speak of religious behaviors and beliefs as natural responses to social pressures and psychological needs in a spiritually luminous environment without prejudging the correctness of beliefs or the appropriateness of actions." Also, this stance "permits a theologically

sophisticated analysis of evaluation of the human being as *homo religiosus*" (all p. 18).

Wildman works to reveal the human species as *homo religiosus*. "This means that we are oriented to primordial, ultimate mystery in our experiences, our social practices, our drives and projective impulses, our longings and failures, our malevolence and love; and that we are so not only historically, culturally, or circumstantially, but also ontologically, essentially, and inescapably" (p. 24). For Wildman, "it is first-order inquiries into the natural world that uncover everything there is to know about human beings, and about the ultimate realities and ultimate concerns that human beings engage in and through nature" (p. 26). This encapsulates Wildman's religious anthropology, which, he believes, will provide a framework for a discussion with the broader academic community, especially since his basic method of inquiry is pragmatic and fallibilist, holding all knowledge as hypothetical, to be superseded when better facts or theory are found. But, as Wildman's wide knowledge so amply testifies, there is much more to learn about everything than only our own first-order encounters.

Engagement with modern academe is not assured, however, because it operates from what Wildman designates as the "*modern secular interpretation of humanity* (MSIH)" (p. 209). This is drawn from the natural sciences, human sciences, and the scientific study of religion. Wildman states that, while not univocal, its "provisional conclusions collectively constitute the basis for a powerful interpretation of human life that is characteristically modern, secular, and interdisciplinary" (p. 209). He also states that "The MSIH is a demanding dialogue partner and consistency with it or even reasoned resistance to it is difficult to achieve. . . . [O]ne measure of the awkwardness of the MSIH [for the religious anthropologist who seeks to engage it] is that it offers a provisional account of *every* aspect of humanity and religion. . . . [N]ot even the most inward subjectivity or the most complex value structures are beyond its interpretative reach, at least in *some* respects" (p. 225–26). He recognizes that there are diverse viewpoints, beliefs, and accepted methods within the MSIH but he states that "the MSIH is sufficiently determinate to impose strong constraints on any wider theological interpretation of the human condition" (p. 209) while not fully determining the outcome of that endeavor.

Wildman is at home in the philosophy of science and in the natural sciences and understands how theories are made and unmade; what can be "proven" and what may be true but cannot be proven. He provides a more detailed exploration of Evolution, Groups, Brains, Bodies, Sex, and Habitat, in the six chapters at the center of his book. I particularly resonated to his attention to the implications of the fact that bacteria were the first life forms; are by many orders of magnitude the most abundant; and operate in, on, and around every other life form symbiotically, neutrally, or antagonistically. Until his final chapter, where he introduces the MSIH, he seems attentive to the idea that humans may not be the central figures of this universe.

Wildman acknowledges that he is wading into very swampy terrain. For instance, many of the common words and ideas of the world's great religions (such as the concept of soul or *jiva*), find little or no place with Wildman's religious naturalism or in the MSIH and, indeed, are profoundly at odds with both. Thus, Wildman has already denied many of the comforts and rationales

of religious traditions that are foundational for their adherents. Even with these ceded, the secular side of the dialogue may still not find the discussion significant enough to be interesting. Nevertheless, Wildman feels that a dialogue between theologians and MSIH would be fruitful for both sides.

At this point, it seems reasonable to ask how a tentative construct such as MSIH can be the unquestioned source of criteria for meaningful advance in understanding and the sole gauge of the degree of consensus. Furthermore, Wildman expresses no concern about the frequent alterations, some of them drastic, which have occurred and continue to evolve in the MSIH. Worse, in my mind, is the fact that the prevalent ethical structure of MSIH is either disinterested or shaped by the economic dogma of self-interest. Perhaps Wildman has inadvertently offered a rather fickle demigod that is unable to recognize the validity of anything beyond a religious naturalism of quarks and genes and current academic fashion? Can MSIH be other than distantly, neutrally appreciative of the supposed comforts or commitments to moral behaviors that are encouraged by religious traditions and practices? Wildman has only discussion to alter its authority. If religious naturalism and MSIH remain in separate magisteria, as seems often to be the case, there is unfortunately little in this book to require the MSIH to come to the table and take up the dialogue. But *Science and Religious Anthropology* will excite a good deal of discussion within parts of the religious community, and it is certainly an interesting framework to consider for persons already interested in the science-religion discussion.

If discussion between Wildman's religious naturalism and MSIH does commence, he is deeply aware of the methodological sinkholes that abound. A subsequent volume will tackle methodological questions related to interdisciplinary inquiry in general and his brand of theological anthropology and religious philosophy in particular (*Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry: Envisioning a Future for Philosophy of Religion*; Albany: State University of New York Press; a third volume on religious and spiritual experiences is also forthcoming). Wildman's *Science and Religious Anthropology* engagingly and clearly outlines an austere religious naturalism and unflinchingly, almost touchingly, helps us understand its possibilities and its limits.

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