

Reviews

Religion without God. By Ronald Dworkin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 180 pp. Hardcover \$17.95.

Dworkin approaches the study of the relation between science and religion as a philosopher asking whether religion can be atheistic. He does not really doubt that religion can be conceived without a need for a supernatural being, whether this be called God or not. There is much in the history of philosophical reflection on religion that lends support to Dworkin's quest. The result is something like what Ursula Goodenough calls naturalistic religion. Religion in this sense then represents something like an orientation to values. The question really becomes whether this orientation can be grounded in a way that does not require a personal Deity. If so, then the relation between religion and science might be significantly reconfigured.

Certainly Dworkin not only has an agenda that involves thinking about religion without God, but he also is interested in characterizing science in a particular way. The model he suggests is probably widely held. He claims that most physicists are "working realists" (p. 57), which means that they are likely to look for what Dworkin calls explanations that assume a mind-independent universe. He argues that beauty cannot be evidence of truth. This is a model that emphasizes the experimental nature of science, assuming that theoretical explanations are tested, with the results of the testing forming the basis for judging whether some hypothesis is accepted. He claims that this process can lead toward a form of beauty (even increasing beauty), but that it is a by-product of rigorous experimentation.

This view of science may, indeed, represent a broadly held perspective in the scientific community, but runs into basic difficulties when dealing with the actual work of scientists. It is not clear that scientific research is always "testing based in terms of judgments." These days we are more likely to accept the commonly held view that science proceeds from research programmes. The fact that these grow from complex theoretical structures, often based on which broad view is more aesthetically pleasing, may suggest that beauty is more than a product of this work. Even his use of Stephen Hawking's work already implies that some of this latter picture of work is involved, as Hawking accepts that more than one explanation can clearly be given for a variety of scientific questions.

Debating the nature of science may seem somewhat esoteric, but the end result is quite significant in judging the larger project of this book. It may be worthwhile to pursue a form of naturalistic religion as an alternative in the science and religion discussions. There are plenty of voices ready to take that up as a project. Even so, it is not so clear that issue centrally has to do with the incompatibility of revealed religion with science. At least much of the science and religion conversation already has been involved in taking on the position that revealed religion is far more compatible than might be assumed with contemporary science. The project of a religion without God is fine, but skews the nature of the conversation as if this

were a distinction between nature and supernatural. I would argue that the latter picture of the conversation is basically misleading.

Still, when Ronald Dworkin writes, it is worth paying attention to his work. The book is a careful development of a broadly held position. We expect such from Dworkin. The book may not produce strikingly new contributions to the science and religion conversation, but it does summarize the sort of position that Dworkin has taken through the years. In this way, it is an important voice in the wider conversation. The reader must have some sophistication in understanding the fields of study within this discussion, but Dworkin writes in a way that even the novice (probably one at an advanced level of work) may find it helpful as a clear introduction to a whole range of questions.

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Ecology and Religion. By John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014. 265 pages. Softcover \$30; Hardcover \$70.

This volume is clearly an effort to give a progress report on a project that these two authors have been pursuing for many years. Their contributions to the area of comparative religions and basic concerns about the environment are well known to most scholars and activists in both fields. They are certainly a regular component of both an examination of the relation between religion and science and the way that the broadening of our understanding of the religions expands the perspective on religion and science. In this way, they have contributed immensely to helping us proceed with caution about certain kinds of claims.

As an effort to provide a progress report, this text also represents one of the few manuscripts in which the two authors decide to present their own views. Much of what they have done is to provide a forum for other scholars who have been drawn into either of the two areas of exploration. It is obvious from their previous work that those who write on religion and science and those who, by contrast, work in comparative religions rarely cross paths. The themes that may emerge from bringing the two studies together have been largely unexplored except for the work of Tucker and Grim. Thus, the text becomes a primer on how this can be done as well, perhaps with the hope that many more will choose to follow the lead of these authors.

Thus, the text reads very much like an introduction. The first section of the book provides basic definitions of nature, ecology, religious ecologies, and the opening dimensions of a field of interreligious ecological discussion. The second portion provides a more focused discussion of the various religions as they approach issues of ecology. The constructive work can be found in the final portion of the book in which the authors develop a global ethic. This is an approach they have been working on for some time and have presented at meetings of the Parliament of the World's Religions. The approach has aimed to develop a basis for interreligious

participation in the promotion of the earth charter created as part of the work of the Parliament. Thus, this implies cooperative dialogue, between the religions, aimed at ethical community.

The latter point underscores the urgency of this conversation. The authors suggest, using the work of Thomas Berry, that we have yet to construct a workable ethic for the environment that clearly draws on the resources of the religions. Because of the fact that our planet faces forms of absolute destruction of the biosphere, the need is rather pressing. The argument is thus to push the effort more aggressively given the urgent need for action that we have. Perhaps this is also a challenge extended to the religions since they may not only be a resource for producing such an ethic, but also may have the structures in place to make such an ethic a viable program for action.

Those who have worked in these fields for a while will not likely find much new in this text, but will be ready to join the authors in the goal of promoting such a global ethic serving ecological purposes. Those who are new to these discussions will find the book a helpful summary and introduction. Thus, the book can work well in the college classroom with accompanying discussion questions for the classroom. Any book from Tucker and Grim is worth our attention and this one should be read, even if only as reminder of this important work.

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Evolution, Religion, and Cognitive Science. Edited by Fraser Watts and Leon Turner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 252 pages. Hardcover \$99.00.

The volume represents a compilation of essays drawn first of all from two conferences related to the celebration of the work of Charles Darwin held at the University of Cambridge in 2009 and the assessment of those papers, subsequently leading to inviting additional contributors and substantial rewriting of those initial conference papers. Thus, the book aims to assess through this collection the current state of a discipline they call an evolutionary cognitive science of religion. The editors do not claim to support or oppose what this discipline has become or the claimed findings of what Turner calls a developed research program. Instead the aim is to produce a forum for assessing the field.

Part of the challenge in assembling this volume out of the beginnings in a conference is to create a sense of unity with the whole. The authors who have responded to the challenge to write for this text are certainly well respected and well known. Contributions by them are likely to be seen as worthwhile regardless of how cohesive the overall argument may seem to be. What makes the task even more of a challenge is the fact that the papers have various aims coming from quite distinct disciplines. Such is the problem with a field that demands

interdisciplinary work. Thus, the book can be read for the value of each essay or for an overall impression of the growing work around this research program.

Calling this a research program may be an initial difficulty. The beginnings of thinking about evolutionary theory as a framework for understanding individual and social behavior mark some questions that are not yet fully resolved. Michael Ruse points to the work of E. O. Wilson as one of the pioneers of this field. Still, Wilson's initial claims now seem somewhat dubious even to Wilson. The notion that evolutionary theory can envelop discussions of social development is problematic. One problem noted by Ruse is the dichotomy between explanations that are individual-centered and those that are group-centered. In either case, the clear pattern among any of these authors is to work toward an expansion of Darwinian evolutionary theories into something like a defensible theory of social evolution such as we find in the essay by Newson and Richerson. This model also has certain challenges (such as the problem of identifying a means for evolutionary transmission other than the genes, as we know from Dawkins's work.)

Another critical issue clearly is the striking differences between the disciplines involved, especially as this includes not only social-scientific disciplines but also work from the humanities, a theme that is of central concern for Turner in his essay. Part of the problem is whether the field aims for purely naturalistic explanations or can take seriously the actual content of the religions that assume a form of specific revelation. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen provides an essay attempting to deal with these sorts of questions. Naturally all of this depends a great deal on which direction the research leads us. The conclusions suggested by Pascal Boyer are certainly quite distinct from the work and intent of Daniel Dennett for example.

In the end, the conclusion must be that certain features of this research are promising, but this does not yet represent a clear field. There is little to suggest that there is a dominant paradigmatic theory that produces the basis for a program. It is at best an emerging field of work even as some of the thinking that laid the foundations is now more than a half century in developing. The essays in the volume are of high quality produced by some of the most significant voices in this arena. To assemble this group is an achievement to begin with. The end result is certainly a volume worth having and consuming in careful detail. This may well be an important initiating collection pushing the field toward a clear research program. Above all, the recognition that evolutionary theory is an important aspect of the work already developing around a cognitive science of religion is significant.

The text is well done, but we should also recognize that the essays are at a high level of discussion presuming some basic knowledge of the work already done. It is an important resource for anyone, but it is likely to be best suited for those at an advanced level of work in any of the disciplines involved in the field of evolutionary cognitive science of religion.

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