

O’Gieblyn’s book is reflective, urging readers to discern the religious, philosophical, and psychological needs often camouflaged by the habits of the digital age. By the culmination in “The End of Meaning,” there is an acknowledgment of the void that unchecked technological progression could exacerbate.

In “God, Human, Animal, Machine,” Meghan O’Gieblyn achieves a commendable feat—marrying the past with the present, spirituality with machinery, and questions with introspections. Although some parallels might be contestable, the book’s core narrative is undeniable and deeply resonant. It is an essential read for anyone intrigued by the intersection of theology, technology, and the ever-evolving human narrative.

Some additional reflections:

- O’Gieblyn’s work compels readers to introspect on their identity, relationships, and cosmic significance.
- Her book disrupts traditional paradigms surrounding technology and spirituality, melding introspection with a futuristic perspective.
- The book’s strengths lie in its compelling narratives, insightful analogies, and a clear call to reflection. Some might argue certain connections to be speculative, but the broader message remains profound.
- I would unreservedly recommend this tome to those at the crossroads of technology and theology, as well as anyone intrigued by the dynamic interplay of historical beliefs and modern advancements.

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Theology, Science and Life. By Carmody Grey. London: T&T Clark, 2023. x + 258 pages. \$115.00. (Hardcover).

The Anglican theologian John Milbank is well-known for his uncompromising defense of theology in the face of its marginalization by the legacy of Enlightenment thinking. In *Theology and Social Theory* he argues that social scientific disciplines, such as sociology, politics and psychology have increasingly regarded theology as concerned with “spirituality”, making it thus irrelevant to robust, empirically based, intellectual enquiry. Milbank argues that theology must fight back and regain its self-confidence. At the heart of his project lies the claim that *all* disciplines are in a sense “theological”, because all concern God’s creation. Too often, however, theologians timidly reconfigure the basic tenets of Christian belief in line with the findings of social science. Milbank contends that, far from occupying such a subordinate role, theology should be “Master” of all discourses and the prism through which all other disciplines are understood and interpreted.

Milbank’s work forms the background to *Theology, Science and Life* by Catholic theologian Carmody Grey, who aims to extend Milbank’s critique to the natural sciences. Since she believes that biology is the most important science in the twenty-first century—a claim likely to raise eyebrows among practitioners of

other scientific disciplines—her primary focus is the dialogue between theology and biology. She wishes to restore theology to its rightful place as “Queen of the Sciences”. This is because all the sciences, and biology *par excellence*, are about life, and life is of God, so they can only be properly understood from a theological perspective. However, she goes further: her aim is to ensure that theology is the controlling narrative when it comes to interpreting the findings of modern biology. What this amounts to in practice, however, is that if biology appears to be saying something which is at odds with her own theological presuppositions, then theology must trump biology.

The main target of Grey’s critique is the materialist approach of Darwinism that continues to dominate modern biological thinking. Biology, perhaps more than any other science, seems committed to a soulless, mechanistic model of life. In an attempt to counter this negative trend, she proposes that we view the natural world through the lens of “theological vitalism”, thus restoring the pre-Enlightenment idea that nature is shot through with the divine presence and *telos*. She turns to the work of the philosopher and biologist Hans Jonas, whose work contains the “vitalist” elements she feels are lacking in modern biology. However, she believes that while Jonas is right to suggest that life is intrinsically inexplicable, and cannot be grasped in terms of reductionist methods of biology, his work falls short in one critical respect: it continues to perpetuate the notion that life is essentially about conflict, violence and death.

Grey finds this unacceptable from a Christian perspective. If we are to believe in a good and loving God, who affirms life over death, then it is God’s peace, righteousness, and harmony that must have governed the natural world from the beginning. Christian theology is fundamentally about the narration of “divine peace”. Death and conflict are therefore “intruders whose presence cannot be accommodated” (232).

This, for Grey, necessitates belief in a historical fall: some cataclysmic primordial event that “distorted” God’s original plan for creation. But as Grey is all too aware, the traditional doctrine of the Adamic fall is no longer tenable: we now know that death was present for millions of years prior to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*. This has led a number of contemporary theologians to abandon the Adamic fall and accept that violence and conflict are not just contingent aspects of creation, but are essential and necessary parts of God’s creative plan.

However, as Grey rightly points out, while this claim might appear consistent with the findings of modern biology, it raises profound problems theologically. Indeed, she argues, if the violence and conflict that dominate our world are the result of God’s original intention for creation, this is tantamount to calling “good” what is in fact evil, and renders our belief in a good and loving God deeply problematic.

According to Grey, if our conception of an omnibenevolent God is to be maintained, we must uphold the belief that a discrepancy exists between our current world and the world as originally created by God. Grey agrees that the Adamic fall is no longer credible, so turns instead to the doctrine that nature was originally corrupted by an angelic fall. Unfortunately, while on one level this stance may help her theologically, it nonetheless runs into considerable difficulties. Christopher Southgate has called it “the mysterious fallenness” position and has referred

to the lack of support for the doctrine from within the Christian tradition. Given how much weight Grey places on the angelic fall, it is surprising that it receives so little elaboration in her book, let alone critical analysis. There appears to be scant recognition of just how speculative and highly problematic the doctrine is. The problem with an “angelic” fall is that we would have to hold that the incredible complexity and beauty of the natural world is not the product of God’s creative mind but has come about as a result of malevolent supernatural forces “twisting” God’s originally good world. Does this mean, then, that it is the fallen angels, not God, who deserve credit for creation?

The reality of an angelic fall is apparently asserted by Grey just because she needs it in order to uphold her theological beliefs. She insists that theology is *right* in its claim that the natural world originally existed in a state of divine peace, irrespective of what the biological evidence currently suggests. Sadly, if this is an example of theology’s “Mastery” over biology—ignoring biological facts which suggest that the world has always been conflict-ridden because one finds them too disturbing to embrace—then it seems uncomfortably reminiscent of the kind of denial made by creationists of scientific data that they find unpalatable.

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