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Book Review: Philosophy of Science: The Natural Sciences In Christian Perspective

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two and three and in the "Interlude" between chapters four and five of the *Fragments*. The criticisms he gives of the arguments as he reconstructs them are indeed telling. However, in several places the reconstructions Roberts gives of the arguments seemed to me uncharitable and less than compelling. Even in these cases the *positive* thrust Roberts sees in the chapters usually seemed right though.

Special applause should be given to Roberts' clear treatment of the central notion of "the absolute paradox." He argues convincingly that the absolute paradox is not a formal or logical contradiction but an affront to the concrete patterns which govern the thinking of sinful human beings. From this perspective, the shocking, incongruous character of Christianity is a mark of its truth, precisely what one would expect in an authentic revelation from God.

In his discussion of the relation between faith and history, the subject of chapters four and five of the *Fragments*, Roberts once more mines gold. There were, as in previous chapters, sections where I could not agree with his claims about what is intended as ironical and what is not. But if we put aside the question of "what did Kierkegaard really mean," as Roberts intends us to, and ask how we ought to think about the relation of faith to history, the Kierkegaard Roberts presents becomes a teacher without peer. The clarity and insights which Roberts produces here rivals his work in the analysis of chapter one.

In this book Roberts is not merely writing about Kierkegaard. He is really doing philosophy, and he forces his reader to do the same. It is an experience which should not be missed.

Philosophy of Science: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective, by **Del Ratzsch**. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986. Pp. 165. Paper \$6.95.

Reviewed by EDWARD L. SCHOEN, Western Kentucky University.

In this addition to the *Contours of Christian Philosophy Series*, Professor Ratzsch offers a brief, elementary text that is designed to introduce students to some of the main issues and debates in the philosophy of science. In conformity with the distinctive vision of the authors participating in this particular series, Professor Ratzsch consistently attempts to relate his discussion to themes central to Christian orthodoxy. He writes with remarkable simplicity, offering an engaging, orderly and clear progression of thought that is accessible even to those who do not come to his book with an extensive background in philosophy.

Professor Ratzsch begins with a general characterization of the natural sciences.

In his attempt to generate a working definition of "natural science" he distinguishes applied from theoretical sciences, contrasts philosophical activity with that of the sciences, introduces a bit of useful terminology and suggests that the scientific enterprise demands such presuppositions as that nature is intelligible and uniform. His first indication of a distinctively Christian perspective comes with the suggestion that these and other necessary presuppositions can be justified by appeal to traditional theistic beliefs. Furthermore, assorted features characteristic of the sciences can be explained by taking recourse to familiar themes of Christian orthodoxy. For instance, by noting that God creates freely, it is possible to account for the fundamentally empirical nature of the sciences. After all, if divine creative activity is not bound by rigid constraint, scientists have no choice but to go out and see what God has produced.

It should be noted that all of this and more is presented in slightly less than six full pages of text. Of course, the pace slows somewhat as Professor Ratzsch moves away from this introductory chapter and into the body of his work. Nevertheless, his overall style remains broad, bold and provocative rather than deeply satisfying.

Professor Ratzsch moves toward the heart of his concerns in the second chapter. He begins by sketching a conception of science that is traceable back to the seventeenth century. After a quick review of a few Baconian themes, attention is turned rather abruptly to a discussion of covering law models for scientific explanation, hypothetico-deductive testing and logical positivism. A short and fairly standard critique of positivist theses places special emphasis upon the failure of a generic version of the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning. This paves the way for the third chapter, a consideration of Kuhn and his more radical cohorts. The fourth chapter is devoted to extracting lessons from the insights as well as the shortcomings of both Kuhnian and more positivist types. Professor Ratzsch concludes with a somewhat obscure and incomplete vision of the sciences. Convinced that observational data can be objective and theory neutral, he also claims that background belief systems as well as value judgments play crucial roles in shaping theory. Although he does not try to specify the precise nature of rational activity, Professor Ratzsch indicates that legitimate reasoning patterns stretch far beyond the purely deductive.

The fifth chapter involves a brief consideration of the place of models in the sciences. Scanning a variety of realist and anti-realist conceptions of the status of scientific theories, Professor Ratzsch eventually settles for a form of realism. He then turns to the focus of the sixth chapter, the limitations of the sciences. He argues that the sciences cannot provide definitive proof of their results. Nor can they validate the methods they employ. Since he finds no room for self-explanatory principles within the sciences, Professor Ratzsch argues that the sciences cannot explain everything. In particular, the sciences are impotent to

explain ultimate origins. Various aspects of the moral realm as well as assorted kinds of purposive explanation also fall beyond the scope of scientific competence.

Professor Ratzsch devotes the last three chapters to the interplay of science and Christian commitment. Beginning with a reply to scientifically flavored arguments against religious belief, he argues that Christians need not fear the sciences. To the contrary, because human beings have been designated as stewards of God's creation, Christians should embrace the scientific enterprise with enthusiasm, pursuing an understanding of the natural realm with special fervor. Although he does not take a firm stance regarding whether any particular Christian convictions should be allowed to influence the content of scientific theory, Professor Ratzsch is willing to claim that Christian values are of profound relevance when it comes to deciding the ways in which it is appropriate to pursue the sciences.

Remarkably, this little book never fails to represent positions and arguments with balanced accuracy. Unfortunately, this particular virtue is compromised somewhat by the author's extremely abbreviated style, a style that forces the substitution of cursory summaries and compressed critiques for more penetrating analyses. The result is a sometimes frustrating absence of detailed argumentation. For example, the Humean problem of induction, which is mentioned at the beginning of the third chapter, receives no systematic exposition and the repudiation of self-explanatory scientific principles, a crucial part of the sixth chapter, might have been more convincing had there been some mention of Robert Nozick's work. Because a substantial number of the author's central claims beg for additional clarification, defense and critique, this work cannot be expected to stand alone as a substantial contribution to the philosophy of science. Nevertheless, its impressionistic style should stimulate wide-ranging debate among its readers. So, within a classroom context, it might function well as an informative, organizing supplement to meatier, primary source material.