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Book Review: Re-enchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy Of Religion

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BOOK REVIEWS

Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion, by David Ray Griffin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. x + 426 pp. \$55.00.

Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts, by David Ray Griffin. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. xvii + 345 pp. \$25.95.

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On the eve of his retirement from the Claremont School of Theology, David Griffin has authored two summary volumes which set forth in learned and clear outline his version of process philosophy in the tradition of Whitehead, Hartshorne, and Cobb. The first book, *Reenchantment*, is focused on his philosophy of religion, and it appears in the Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion series, edited by W. P. Alston. The second book, *Religion*, is his proposal for the current science-and-religion dialogue, and it has come out in a series he himself edits with SUNY Press in Constructive Postmodern Thought. Both books are well worth reading, especially for any scholar interested in the process school of thought concerning either the philosophy of religion, or in the growing field of science-and-religion, where indeed process thought has an important following. While the school of process philosophy is hardly monolithic, Griffin has provided us with a useful summary of one significant variant in that tradition, for the benefit of students and teachers alike.

We begin with philosophy of religion. The title of Griffin's book requires some explanation. In his classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), the great German sociologist Max Weber argued that the spirit of modern capitalism (i.e., modern purpose-driven rationality) has led to a "disenchantment" with the world, a pragmatism in which value choices and meaning are merely subjective and thus irrational according to the rational standards of modernity. Griffin wants to present us with a postmodern worldview that, while completely "natural" is also value-laden, fully rational and fully scientific: a "reenchantment" of nature. He finds this in the metaphysics of Whitehead. Griffin argues that his philosophy is a version of naturalism, because it forbids miracles (understood



as interruptions of the natural order of events).

I doubt that many philosophers will find this definition of naturalism very persuasive. It seems to confuse the cause with the effect. True, metaphysical naturalism implies that miracles are impossible. But the impossibility of miracles does not imply metaphysical naturalism, and does not provide us with much of a definition of naturalism. On such a definition, deism will turn out to be a form of naturalism – which is absurd. Metaphysics in the tradition of Whitehead is far better described as panpsychism or panentheism.

It is practically impossible to justify, in books of this sort, the basic metaphysical principles of process thought. Griffin usually refers us to Whitehead for these points. For example, I have never found Whitehead's notion of "actual entity" either attractive or plausible. Such a position is assumed rather than justified. Thus, Griffin has chosen a kind of presuppositional approach, which reminded this reader of Cornelius Van Til. His basic presuppositions are spelled out, explained, and then defended against opposition. They are not, in the first instance, justified in general terms. The first chapter of *Reenchantment* sets forth his definition of process philosophy, and the ten "core doctrines" which are the heart of the book. Some of these principles are formal, some are methodological, and some are both substantial and particular. The rest of the volume explains and expands upon these key ideas in dialogue with issues and thinkers of the day. This is not, then, a standard textbook in philosophy of religion, but the clarification and exposition of one particular kind of philosophy (which might make a useful supplementary classroom text).

Among the formal doctrines, I applaud the first: one of the central tasks of philosophy is the integration of moral, aesthetic and religious intuitions with the most general doctrines of science. I am less convinced by his ninth doctrine: the "ideals of contemporary civilization" need the "cosmological support" of philosophy. He spells this out more fully in chapter 8, where he seeks to ground moral absolutes in cosmology. This is where the reenchantment comes in. It turns out, however, that "cosmology" in ethics reduces to theism, in practical terms, in this chapter. This is a strange way of grounding ethics in the cosmos! His views would be better developed in dialogue with advocates of contemporary natural law and divine command theories, which are strangely absent from this chapter.

Another formal doctrine (no. 3) asserts that "hard core common sense" propositions must be affirmed in any rational worldview. Griffin explains that these are "notions we inevitably presuppose in practice" (30). The danger here is in packing these so-called universal truths of common sense with our own favorite biases. Alas, Griffin falls into this trap when he claims (in chapters 2, 8 and 10) that belief in a Holy Reality and in normative values are among these supposedly inevitable assumptions. This raises the question of how we justify a particular proposition as "hard core." Griffin seems to reject Kant's approach. So how do we know they are true? "We directlyprehend these realities" (357). This epistemology seems to fall apart upon careful scrutiny. Does he mean to claim that we directly "prehend" moral absolutes? That flies smack in the face of empirical evidence, unless some kind of epistemic epicycles are added in to explain why

so many humans are deluded about these universal, moral principles we all directly apprehend.

This last comment leads to one of the most controversial aspects of Griffin's work. In both of these books, Griffin is at pains to defend a "nonsensationalist doctrine of perception" in which our access to the external world is not limited to the five senses.

I am myself tempted to put the idea that we are limited in our perception of external reality to the five bodily senses among those hard core common sense notions mentioned earlier. But no, Griffin calls this "sensationalism" (as Whitehead did), and is at pains to defend the idea that we have other means of access to reality. Therefore, Griffin defends ESP and parapsychology in his book on religion and science. I confess I am still dubious. Scientists do not doubt ESP because they are prejudiced against it (as Griffin thinks), but because they have tested it, and found no positive evidence in favor of it. Here Griffin appears to leave behind the scientific method.

Among the other rather difficult doctrines which Griffin is at pains to explain is the doctrine (no. 5) that all objects are aggregates ("societies") of "occasions of experience" and the corresponding notion (no. 4) that all genuine entities have some degree of freedom and experience. The problem of Griffin's presuppositional approach raises its head once again. He is very good at showing the helpfulness of his core doctrines if we believe them to be true. But why should we accept them in the first place? These core doctrines of Whitehead's metaphysics are the most difficult to believe. Why are the real entities these tiny events called actual occasions, rather than the everyday objects of common sense? Surely a pen or a person is a real thing, but made up of parts. Why should we assume that the *parts* are what is truly real? Modern physics teaches us that the smallest particles have a very limited sort of concrete reality. Why not start with the reality of everyday things, and then move on in ontology? Such a common sense approach would appear to be what Griffin is committed to by other, formal doctrines in his system. He does not appear to notice this internal tension. Griffin is content to refer to Whitehead's own work for such justification. Too often he simply appeals to Whitehead, as if that was the final test of truth.

Griffin does go beyond both Hartshorne and Whitehead, in developing his "doubly dipolar theism" (doctrine no. 8). Whitehead taught that God was a single actual entity, with both a consequent and a primordial nature. Griffin follows Hartshorne in seeing God as a temporal series, a "serially ordered society of divine occasions of experience," just like other things. One dipolarity, then, is between the concrete states of God's life, and the abstract divine essence. To this is added to the earlier dipolarity, as John Cobb argued it should be in 1965 (in *A Christian Natural Theology*).

Anyone interested in process theology should read this work with care. Assuming certain basic positions in Whitehead's metaphysics, Griffin does a fine job of carefully spelling out what this overall position would mean in the philosophy of religion. He covers the right topics, and lays out his position with skill. This summary of process philosophy of religion will serve future generations well.

The second work by Griffin under review, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, can be understood as a development of the other book (which

was in fact published one year later). Griffin is at pains in this work to overcome the conflicts between religion and science. We can agree with him that this is a laudatory goal, with no little cultural import. At the same time, however, the work has some of the problems of the earlier book. It is a long essay of the form, "If we assume that process metaphysics is correct, then such-and-such is the valuable result." He is surely right in understanding that, if one does assume that process thought is correct, the conflicts between religion and science will be overcome. But the metaphysical cure may be worse than the intellectual cold.

Griffin does a good job of covering many of the major issues in the current religion and science debate, as these touch upon philosophical topics. I am very much in favor with the thesis of the first chapter, that we need to integrate science and religion into a philosophical worldview (5). But I cannot accept the assertion that modern science "necessarily presupposes naturalism" (11). This highly controversial point is defended in chapter 3, where he considers the proposal for a "theistic science," in dialogue with Al Plantinga and Phil Johnson. Griffin does not come off well as an historian of ideas in these chapters. Theism (which he calls "supernaturalistic theism") has its roots in the classical period, not in the "mechanistic view of nature" of the Enlightenment where Griffin places it (27). The mechanistic worldview is a part of modernism, having more to do with deism than with classical Western religion. Likewise, the "scheme of primary and secondary causation" (38-40) is a product of the high Middle Ages, and in any case Griffin gives a very unsympathetic explanation of this Christian philosophy of science. In the long run, Griffin presents a wholly unconvincing case that belief in God and miracles undermines natural science. He misunderstands the point that natural science is supposed to explore the world of secondary causes, which by definition are stable and invariable. That God may, by absolute omnipotence, act in other ways is quite irrelevant, since this claim belongs to theology not natural science. That was the medieval and early modern viewpoint, the division of labor between science and theology that allowed for the rise of early modern science. The sooner we return to it, the better, in my view! Griffin's chapter on religion and the rise of modern science, then, needs to be set in the 14th and 15th century, not the 17th. He focuses too exclusively upon the "mechanistic" philosophy of nature, which comes in only later and is much easier for him to reject along with all "supernaturalism."

Having set forth the superiority of his "naturalistic theism" to his satisfaction, Griffin considers several themes in religion and science. These include parapsychology, the mind-body problem, the Big Bang, and evolution. Whitehead fits well with parapsychology and evolution, but not so well with modern cosmology. Some panentheists like Phil Clayton have come to embrace the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* on scientific and philosophical grounds, thus rejecting traditional Whiteheadian philosophy. Griffin still holds out for his "creation out of chaos" and some sort of eternal universe alongside God. Both of these positions seem inconsistent with modern science, but Griffin strives mightily to defend them.

In the current renaissance of dialogue and debate concerning science and religion, there is a significant presence of process thinkers. Important scholars in this field embrace a process perspective, even if they modify some aspects. Examples of this position include Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Haught, and Phil Clayton, although each one of these authors modifies traditional Whiteheadian positions to some degree. It is good to have in this volume by Griffin a re-statement of the classical Whiteheadian position in the current religion and science dialogue. I recommend this work to anyone interested in the topic of process theology and natural science. Taken together, these books represent a major summary of Griffin's philosophy, and stand as a fitting capstone to his career at Claremont.

Naturalism: A Critical Analysis, edited by Wm. Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Pp. ix and 286. \$90 (hardcover).

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Naturalism: A Critical Analysis is a valuable volume for those who would like to bring themselves up to date on criticisms of naturalism as a worldview and on the comparative merits of theism as a worldview. The eleven authors of this volume are convinced that under extended scrutiny the philosophical naturalism that dominated the philosophical scene for most of the twentieth century has now been shown to generate dilemmas and have costs that are daunting at best and prohibitive at worst whereas theism is proving to be quite resilient. Each of the ten chapters of *Naturalism* was written by a different author (the first article is co-authored). The first three chapters are on epistemology, the next four on ontology, the eighth on value theory, and the last two on natural theology. Three aims shared by most chapters are (1) to identify phenomena or problems that naturalism has not dealt with adequately, and perhaps cannot deal with adequately, (2) to explain why a consistent naturalism must be strictly physicalist and therefore eschew emergent, supervenient, mental, and abstract properties and entities, and (3) to show that philosophical theism is a more comprehensive and adequate worldview than is philosophical naturalism. Most of these authors have published extensively on the topics about which they write in *Naturalism*, so to some extent their articles (written for this volume) serve as valuable introductions to and updates of their work. In such a short review I cannot summarize and critique each of ten wide-ranging, technical articles, so I have chosen to summarize each chapter without critique. The title of each chapter precedes my summary of it.

Farewell to philosophical naturalism

Paul Moser and David Yandell begin by posing a dilemma for naturalism. If naturalism cleaves to strict physicalism, it cannot account for the