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Book Review: Theology, Aesthetics, And Culture: Responses To The Work Of David Brown

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contributions is excellent, but I suspect that they will be of interest only to Christian theists, so I will not elaborate on them here. Given space constraints, I have also not discussed papers by Jeremy Gwiazda, John Leslie, Peter Forrest, and Michael Schryemaker. But all of their contributions merit study by philosophers interested in the multiverse.

Throughout this review I have highlighted some of the tensions between scientific accounts of the multiverse and the recent philosophical reasons theists have for a multiverse. There are, of course, deeper issues lurking here about the interaction between science and philosophy. A multiverse with a threshold coheres better with theism because it does not include every universe, and thus excludes extremely evil ones. However, it fails to preserve our modal intuitions that universes far worse than ours are indeed genuine possibilities. The scientific evidence is controversial, but both Mann and Page agree that if there is a multiverse, then every logically possible universe is concrete. This view preserves our intuitions that our universe could be a lot worse, since if there is a multiverse, then there really are other worse universes. But the theist will likely remain uncomfortable with this scenario because it entails such a large amount of evil (perhaps infinite?) co-existing with God.

The overall quality of the essays in this volume is excellent. They all make interesting and unique contributions to the multiverse literature. I was most fascinated by the papers from Megill, Almeida, and Nagasawa. The section on pantheism will be welcome to those who have recently criticized contemporary philosophy of religion for its narrow focus on Christian theism. This volume is important to any philosopher interested in the multiverse. I also predict that it will become required reading for any philosopher of religion wanting to research the connection(s) between God and the multiverse. I highly recommend it.

Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown, edited by Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 313 pages. \$125.00 (hardback).

J. SAGE ELWELL, Texas Christian University

This volume of nineteen essays, with accompanying "Response" and "Postscript," comes out of papers presented at a 2010 conference hosted by the Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts at the University of St. Andrews entitled "Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Conversations with the Work of David Brown." The book includes the twelve plenary papers from the conference and seven additional chapters. The book is



divided into five sections, with each section containing three to six chapters, each dedicated to different themes in one of Brown's five books.

David Brown's seminal book series has been widely reviewed, discussed, and utilized in both academic and ecclesial contexts. However, there have been no critical book-length studies of his five-volume contribution. *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture* thus stands alone as an indispensable critical assessment of Brown's writing and an important original contribution to the study of theology and culture in its own right.

Contributing authors were invited to summarize a particular dimension of Brown's thought, offer critique and commentary on that dimension, and then apply their reflections to their own work or area of specialization. The result is a "symposium-like" collection of essays that ranges in both topics and methods while remaining accessibly unified around the single book under consideration in each section.

By way of a brief preface, it may be useful to recall that between 1999 and 2008 David Brown published five thematically united volumes with Oxford University Press. These books marshaled Brown's impressive scholarly acumen and theological imagination around a diverse array of topics broadly related to theology and culture, from art and architecture to pop music and sex. In his introduction to *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture*, MacSwain summarizes the overarching commitments and conclusions that unify Brown's approach and agenda across these five volumes:

that human imagination no less than reason is essential to the theological enterprise; that Scripture is not a fixed text but a manifestation of a living and moving tradition; that revelation is a culturally-enmeshed, fallibly-mediated, and progressively-grasped phenomenon; and that divine action, grace, and truth are to be found outside the Christian Church as well as within, in secular philosophy and other religions no less than through the work of painters, sculptors, writers, composers, musicians, dancers, athletes, filmmakers, architects, town planners, landscape gardeners, and so forth.

For those unfamiliar with Brown's work, the above aptly captures the essence of his thought in as succinct a manner as is possible and provides the necessary, though by no means sufficient, introduction to the overarching vision of the five volumes of his work under consideration in the book presently under review. The following offers a brief summary of the contents of each section and concludes with reflections on the volume as a whole.

Following the sequence of the original publication of Brown's five books, the first section address Brown's first book in the series, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change*, and contains chapters by William J. Abraham, Richard Viladesau, and Margaret R. Miles. Abraham and Miles take up Brown's proposal that both scripture and tradition can and should be considered divine revelation. Abraham considers this problematic because it inflates the epistemological value of historically conditioned insights and "truths" of the imagination. Miles, however, advances on Brown's proposal by suggesting that the ongoing revelation of God that unfolds in specific times and places should be supplemented with a deeper

appreciation of the “intelligent body” — a unity of mind/soul and material/flesh — that is the vessel of this ongoing revelation. Meanwhile, Viladesau puts Brown in conversation with Karl Rahner on the subject of revelation and Christology.

The second section explores Brown’s *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* and contains chapters by Richard Bauckham, Tina Beattie, and Douglas Hedley. Bauckham explores the possibilities and problems of appealing to the lives of the saints and the practice of their veneration as models for imagining discipleship. Beattie sees Brown’s celebration of the “progressive” imagining of discipleship throughout history and his acknowledgement of the complex and fallible nature of discerning God’s ongoing revelation as fundamentally problematic. In response, she proposes the figure of the New Eve as a possible model for a more nurturing, maternal path of discipleship. She pursues this line through an exploration of the figure of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene in the arts as exemplars of the New Eve. Hedley advances on Brown’s claim that revealed truth unfolds in history to explore the transformative truth-value of fiction and poetry, concluding that Brown offers a vision of how the creative imagination can apprehend, reinforce, and intensify the truths of revelation.

The third section takes up Brown’s *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* and includes chapters by Gordon Graham, Charles Taliaferro, and Mark Wynn. Graham considers Brown’s reflections on icons and church architecture and argues that “enchancing” is something we *do* as opposed to something we *experience*. Taliaferro then neatly follows with an examination of Brown on religious experience and suggests Brown’s epistemology of experience would benefit from greater dialogue with analytic philosophy of religion. Lastly, Wynn expands on Brown’s proposed “sacramental” account of the natural world by appealing to scholarship in the phenomenology of sacred space.

The fourth, and longest, section considers Brown’s *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* and contains chapters by Kimerer L. LaMothe, Jeremy S. Begbie, Gavin Hopps, Judith S. Casselberry, Clive Marsh, and Graham Ward. LaMothe focuses on Brown’s argument that dance is religious by supplementing his case with reflections from three modern dancers—Ruth St. Denis, Isadora Duncan, and Martha Graham—pursuant to a theory of dance as “theopraxis.” Begbie takes up Brown on classical music and suggests that his project needs greater theological specificity vis-à-vis some criteria for theological analysis and exegesis of classical music. Importantly, Begbie also responds to Brown’s critiques of his own work on theology and music, clarifying and defending his position against Brown’s criticisms. Hopps turns to Brown on pop music and praises Brown for considering this so-called “low” musical form without obvious religious implications and encourages future explorations to look beyond declarative lyrics to the *way* pop music speaks in the aesthetics of performance, rhythm, and reception. Casselberry offers perhaps the most

sharply critical chapter in the book, arguing that Brown's writing on pop, jazz, and the blues lacks the necessary attention to musical genealogy, is inattentive to issues of race, gender, and class, and employs a problematic Enlightenment epistemology that undermines his overall project. Marsh acknowledges Brown's seeming openness to theological engagement with popular culture, but critiques his reluctance to stray too far from the high arts. Marsh argues that serious engagement with television, for example, would yield conclusions contrary to Brown's own and could ultimately enrich systematic theology. Lastly, advancing on Brown's theology of the body, Ward appeals to a fully incarnational Christology to critique Brown's claims regarding Christ's post-mortem state and the suggestion that humans could become "like Christ" in any way that would dissolve our humanity or embodiment.

Section five explores Brown's book *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Though Metaphor and Drama* and includes chapters by David Fuller, Trevor Hart, Ben Quash, and Ann Loades and Bridget Nichols. In full support of Brown's contention that the church should embrace the religious power of metaphor and poetry, Fuller goes beyond Brown to suggest that religious experience is itself a type of poetry and not merely a vehicle for the religious. Like Fuller, Hart explores Brown's vision of the sacramental potential of the poetic image while suggesting a more protracted engagement with scripture and the doctrine of the incarnation, "the *"enfleshed Word."* Quash asks after the unifying theme that binds together Brown's wide-ranging final book, concluding that it is liturgy in all dimensions of life. Moreover, Quash proposes an expanded vision of liturgy that embraces the possibility that even mundane daily events—from studying to meeting with friends—can be treated as liturgical. In the final chapter, Loades and Nicholas take up Brown's challenge to engage the totality of the human person in considerations of liturgy and worship such that language and body are not separated by methodologies that implicitly prize one over the other. Putting Brown in conversation with George Steiner and his book *Real Presences*, they propose liturgy and worship as the meditative locus where the real gift of the church, the gift of the embodied Christ, is disclosed.

In the penultimate chapter, Brown responds to the contributors by reflecting on the experience of God in four arenas: the natural world, culture, biblical revelation, and human and divine embodiment. Brown takes up suggestions and critiques thematically, responding to them as they fall under given subject-areas. Brown does not shy away from addressing specific critiques. He acknowledges limitations and missteps where appropriate, defends his position where he sees misinterpretation, and humbly and graciously accepts praise, concluding with a reiteration of his overarching thesis that God is no less present in the humble and mundane than the beautiful and rare.

Taylor Worley then offers a final, and profoundly helpful, summary of the volume's overall conversation and proposes a way forward in his postscript on theology's "Ekphrastic Mode." Worley commends Brown's

project and encourages theologians to continue responding to God's "divine generosity" in art and culture in a way that renders divinity in an imperfect but ever-striving performance of interpretation. Such efforts, Worley contends, yield a theology of the incarnation grounded in the practicalities of material culture that eschews protracted theorizing and participates in the ongoing creative disclosure of the divine.

Over fifty years ago, Oxford University Press published a collection of essays by Paul Tillich under the title *Theology of Culture. Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture* continues this tradition of reflection in superb fashion. For those interested in the thought of David Brown, theology of culture (or theology for culture) generally, Christianity and the arts, or religion, embodiment, and the incarnation, as well as the implications of these themes for philosophy of religion, this book is essential reading. The text is at times weighty and jargon-filled and not for the uninitiated. This is a collection of scholars writing to and for other scholars. But the payoff is well worth the effort.

Beyond its occasional, but generally necessary, opacity of concepts and language, the book's only limitation is its relative inattention to continental and postmodern thinkers. Including them would, in my opinion, open the conversation both philosophically and theologically beyond the parameters of a narrowly construed Christian theological tradition. That aside, MacSwain and Worley have put together a kind of conversation in print among some of the leading thinkers on Christianity and culture around some of the most important topics of the day at a time when the cultural relevance of the church is increasingly called into question. More than mere a primer on the work of David Brown, *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture* makes an original and important contribution to theology of culture in its own right and deserves the attention of anyone interested in how Church doctrine and Christian theology generally might meaningfully engage with the secular world of art and culture.

The Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry Moore's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism, by David Leech. Leuven: Peeters, 2013. xvi + 278 pages. €52 (paper).

LESLEY-ANNE DYER WILLIAMS, Baylor University

Henry Moore was a seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist who was among the first to write philosophy in English rather than Latin. He also played a major role in the rise of a new kind of natural theology, known as physico-theology, based upon the scientific advances of the age. This book argues that Henry Moore articulated a new concept of spirit in order

