

Published Review of

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***Religion, Science and Naturalism*. By Willem B. Drees. Pp. xv, 314, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, £40.00 (US\$59.95).**

Many agree that the human intellect has a tendency towards unity and harmony. Some intellectual disciplines, however, seem to be quite far apart and do not overlap at all. Does the botanist really need to know what the flight-engineer is doing? Does the poet really need to know what the plasma-physicist is constructing? One may speak of a spectrum of disciplines wherein some are far apart, and others are close neighbours with considerable mutual dependence. Where should one place theology and science within the spectrum of human intellectual endeavour?

Drees offers in five chapters a useful panorama of some ways this question can be answered. In the first chapter he gives a preliminary picture of the position he will be later defending. He calls it naturalism. Although his version cannot be readily summarised, one may safely say that he avoids the strongest version according to which *all* legitimate questions are scientific questions, and thus that all knowledge can be reduced to science. For him, non-material aspects of reality, like music, should not be eliminated but considered as embodied in forms which are in the domain of the natural sciences. Hence for music, we have ink on paper, or vibrations of strings. As a consequence, the domain of science underpins all other domains. The word 'embodied' is however misleading. Whatever science will tell us about the nature of the ink, or the elasticity of the material of the string, cannot ever help us appreciate the music. Drees unfortunately never addresses such crucial issues. He seems keen on linking science to theology without getting really involved in philosophy. It is not clear whether his naturalism allows him to hold that there are some legitimate questions that are *certainly not* scientific questions and cannot be resolved by scientific research.

After the introductory chapter, the bulk of the book consists in an attempt to extract theological insights from recent scientific progress as regards our knowledge of the world and of human nature. The second chapter clears the ground by including a historical discussion touching on the Galileo affair and the post-Darwinian conflicts. In the following chapter, two areas of interaction between science and theology are considered: interaction concerning discoveries about the natural world, and interaction concerning discoveries about the scientific method, which, to Drees, is constitutive of our major heuristic tool. In this chapter, one finds an evaluation of recent studies

dealing with the possibility of using scientific discoveries in theology, and hence dealing with such issues as divine action, scientific and theological realism, and so on.

The fourth chapter contains a discussion on human nature. Drees holds that if we over-emphasise the difference between divine and natural action, God's relation to the world may 'become totally unclear' (p. 162). Hence, he deliberately avoids approaches that make a clear distinction between, on the one hand, temporal, natural processes and, on the other hand, a-temporal divine creativity and sustenance. He seems here to avoid any deep reflection on whether one could legitimately sacrifice the transcendence of God in the name of clarity. He thus seems oblivious to the risk of cutting God down to size, so as to make scientific results relevant. For an interaction between scientific and theological discourse on human nature, he alludes without further ado to works which explore the way we allegedly arrive at understanding a-temporal divine characteristics via temporal processes within our brains. This does not involve the discoveries of physics but those of neuroscience, a discipline which relates most intimately to our understanding of experience, consciousness, and so on. Moreover, human nature is discussed also in terms of evolution, which allows novel ways of understanding religion as a culture-shaping tradition.

In the final chapter Drees attempts to give a clearer description of what science, reality and religion should look like from a naturalist point of view. As regards science, one should avoid claiming that this discipline delivers truth in an a-historical way, and yet one should avoid also claiming that science has no special status in comparison with other practices. As regards reality, a naturalist view accepts the results of present science in such a way that various analogies and metaphors central to theology will need occasional revision if they are to remain effective. As regards religion, protagonists of naturalism, according to Drees, should listen carefully not only to what is said by anthropologists and sociologists about the presence of religion in society but also to what is said by natural scientists.

Overall, the book is very well documented. It alludes to a vast number of recent works dealing with the interaction between current scientific theories and theology. Unfortunately, the line of argument is not always clear. The introductions or summaries at the beginning of each chapter do not make this any easier. Moreover, it is sad that the book makes very little reference to the great classical philosophical treatment of the issues raised. Drees gives the impression that discussions engaged in within these last twenty years have never been treated in any useful way by the great intellectuals in the course of history. This approach is debatable. In the specific area of the interaction between faith and reason, the work done by major philosophers in previous centuries is still of considerable relevance even though the actual content of scientific knowledge in their day was different from ours. Disregard for our heritage is not always wise.

What is perhaps the most useful aspect of the book is the classification of areas of *recent* discussion. Drees suggests a 3 × 3 matrix with one axis consisting of three challenges arising from recent scholarship, and the other axis consisting of three aspects of religion. The challenges are those originating from new knowledge, those originating from new ways of understanding how we come to know, and those originating from new ways of appreciating the world. The three aspects of religion that respond to each of these challenges are the cognitive aspect, the experiential

aspect and the traditional aspect. Within the nine spaces the matrix permits, Drees attempts to fit in all the current trends dealing with science and theology. Even though we cannot be sure that all trends should fit in nicely, the proposed synthesis is certainly a useful guide. Because of this, the book will be a good read for research students in the area of science and theology. Professional philosophers will probably find that some discussions verge on the superficial. Nevertheless, theologians seeking a survey of a kind of recent literature whose popularity is apparently on the increase will find the book beneficial.

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