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SCIENTISM AND SECULARISM: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology by J. P. Moreland. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 224 pages. Paperback; \$16.99. ISBN: 9781433556906.

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Book Reviews

a “two books” paradigm, to an integrative approach. Barth’s concern with natural theology is in opposition to ideology wherever it is found—be it religion or science. Both liberal theology and fundamentalism are guilty of fostering unhealthy ideological paradigms that short-circuit dialogue. This is central to the conflict with science within contemporary white evangelicalism as they are much more concerned with maintaining political power and social status than having honest discussion about faith and science. The evangelical opposition to science—including issues related to the current pandemic—has less to do with theology or science, and more to do with ideological forces that maintain the cultural status quo. The politics of science and religion, which Cootsona alludes to in his account of the Scopes trial, deserves much more attention.

Finally, there is the absence of contemporary scholarship that might support his project. While Charles Taylor is Canadian, his monumental work *A Secular Age* provides important insight into the rise of secularity in the West, including American culture. Taylor demonstrates how the shift in social imaginary that results from the Reformation creates the cultural conditions in which the scientific revolution and the rise of fundamentalism are possible. A primary focus of his work is to explore the conditions that lead to the current emphasis of spirituality over traditional forms of religion, which is the experience of emergent adulthood. Similarly, both J. Wentzel van Huyssteen (*Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*) and Ilia Delio (*The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*) offer important insights for the faith and science conversation that address the contemporary experience of emergent adults in America.

Overall, Cootsona’s book is an important contribution to the conversation about science and religion. He provides a creative interdisciplinary approach that helps religious communities as they engage scientific questions. As a practical theologian, this interdisciplinary approach, along with his desire to articulate new models for an increasingly pluralistic and secular American culture, provides important steps toward the cultivation of meaningful conversations between religion and science.

Reviewed by Jason Lief, Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA 51041.

SCIENTISM AND SECULARISM: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology by J. P. Moreland. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 224 pages. Paperback; \$16.99. ISBN: 9781433556906.

Early in his new book, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*, J. P. Moreland relates a story of a hospital stay. After telling his nurse that he earned his BS in physical chemistry, his ThM in theology, his MS in philosophy, and his PhD in philosophy,

she observes that he “had taken two very unrelated, divergent paths” (p. 23).

Before she could explain further, I asked if this was what she meant: I started off in science, which deals with reality—hard facts—and conclusions that could be proved to be true. But theology and philosophy were, well, fields in which there were only private opinions and personal feelings ... (p. 23)

In response, Moreland’s nurse looks surprised and acknowledges this “was exactly what she had in mind” (p. 24). Rather than supposing his interlocutor is simply a kind nurse hoping to move on to her next patient, Moreland instead interprets the position he articulates for her as illustrating that “scientism” is “the intellectual and cultural air that we breathe” (p. 24).

Scientism is the nemesis in Moreland’s book. He loathes it. But the precise definitional target of his loathing is not always clear. Early in the book, Moreland distinguishes “strong scientism” and “weak scientism.” Strong scientism claims “something is true, rationally justified, or known if and only if it is a scientific claim that has been successfully tested and that is being used according to appropriate scientific methodology” (p. 27). Weak scientism, by contrast, “acknowledges truth apart from science,” but “still implies that science is by far the most authoritative sector of human knowing” (p. 28). That’s a helpful distinction, even if it is doubtful whether many accept strong scientism (Moreland provides no examples), and depending on how one defines “authoritative,” it is also doubtful whether many people *reject* weak scientism. Having thus introduced the distinction, however, this nuance is often lost in the pages that follow, even in places where the clarity could have proved useful. More problematically, we never get a definition of what Moreland means by “science.” To his credit, Moreland defends the omission, claiming that science cannot, in principle, be demarcated from nonscience (pp. 160–63). Still, it is difficult to follow the implications of Moreland’s argument—effectively, an extended argument against scientism—without a working definition of what science is. Do only the hard sciences count? Or do the so-called soft sciences count as well? Or might empirical-leaning philosophy and theology and history count too? These distinctions are not readily available, and so it isn’t clear precisely what position Moreland is arguing against. It is clear only that Moreland really dislikes it.

When Moreland offers data to support his argument, the results are also disappointing. For example, while reflecting on the supposed conflict between science and religion, Moreland estimates

that 95% of science and theology are cognitively irrelevant to each other ... in that other 5% or so of science, there is direct interaction with Christian doctrine. Within this category, I would say that 3% of science provides further evidential support for Christian teaching ... that leaves 2% of current scientific claims that may seem to undermine Christian theology. (pp. 173–74, emphasis Moreland’s)

None of these data are cited. They instead appear to be precisely what Moreland says they are—Moreland shooting from the hip. Oddly, he includes a pie chart to illustrate his guesswork.

Worse than these eccentricities, Moreland regularly falls prey to the very kind of scientific thinking he decries. On one hand, he proposes that “[t]he primary academic disciplines suited to studying the nature of consciousness ... are biblical studies, theology, and philosophy of mind” (p. 85). This view, to be frank, seems rather idiosyncratic and is not one that many academics, including religious ones, would ascribe to. Theistic philosophers rarely lean on biblical scholarship in developing their views of consciousness. On the other hand, Moreland’s own variety of scientism appears in his defense of intelligent design, a position that accepts God’s direct action throughout evolutionary history. Moreland strongly endorses intelligent design understood this way. Moreover, he emphasizes that we have scientific reasons to endorse the position:

intelligent design advocates believe that they can and have discovered scientific data that is best explained by an intelligent designer—the origin of the universe, life, consciousness, cases of irreducible complexity, and so on. (p. 171)

Understood in this way, intelligent design takes the hypothesis of an intelligent designer to be our best *scientific* explanation for a range of phenomena. Intelligent design thus stands against rival theistic accounts of evolution such as theistic evolution. Theistic evolution rejects the perspective offered by intelligent design, claiming that a creator is not best construed as a scientific hypothesis. Rather, according to theistic evolution, our reason to believe in God comes largely from nonscientific disciplines such as theology or philosophy. Accounts of creation such as theistic evolution are therefore comfortable with the claim that we can know about God as creator without requiring that this knowledge be distinctively scientific. For Moreland, by contrast, it seems God’s creative action is best understood as empirically detectable, and that science offers a privileged perspective on our knowledge of God as creator. In discarding rival theistic accounts in favor of his brand of intelligent design, Moreland thus seems to embrace the very kind of scientism he pleads with us to reject.

Do some of Moreland’s arguments land? Of course! Moreland is a professional philosopher with an impressive record. For example, his argument that scientism is self-refuting (p. 47–51) has strong moments: if scientism claims that science offers our *only* route to knowledge, then accepting that claim entails that we ought not accept scientism, since the position stakes a claim that can’t be scientifically verified. Of course, this kind of argument works only for a particularly strong version of scientism, one that resembles the discarded logical positivism of the early twentieth century more than the subtler kinds of scientism that are widely held today.

Likewise, some of Moreland’s arguments for the immateriality of consciousness (pp. 86–88), the cosmological argument (p. 133–39), and the fine tuning argument (pp. 141–47) track contemporary conversations, even if these arguments are more controversial than Moreland gives them credit for. The problem with Moreland’s book is not that it is completely devoid of clear philosophical thinking. The problem is that the wheat is mixed thoroughly with the chaff, and the two are difficult to separate.

Do we recommend the book? Not for the casual reader. Moreland’s book is misleading; dangerous for the believer in its mischaracterizations and simplifications, infuriating for the unbeliever in its handling of both science and religion. Importantly, we (the reviewers) agree on this despite coming from different places: one of us (Vukov) is a Catholic and philosopher; the other (Burns), an atheist and biologist. For the careful scholar, though, the book may be worth skimming, as a spur to more careful reflection. Whether scientism is true or false, it has wide-reaching implications. We agree that the subject merits a serious and careful book-length discussion. That’s just not what Moreland’s book delivers.

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ORIGINS

A WORLDVIEW APPROACH TO SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE by Carol Hill. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2019. 240 pages. Hardcover; \$29.99. ISBN: 9780825446146.

On February 4, 2014, Bill Nye and Ken Ham debated matters of creation, science, and faith. Because this encounter pitted two very public figures against each other—a famous PBS personality and a very flamboyant creationist—this event was highly anticipated. Unfortunately, the results were frustratingly inconsequential. The debate, however, did crystalize the irritations that often gravitate around debates of science and faith. So often, the participants talk past each other instead of engaging each other. The person of faith will often lament the scientist’s narrow-mindedness and fallaciousness because they ignore variables valued by positions of faith. Conversely, the person of science will likely mock the faithful as naive simpletons who cling to their texts and ignore data that confronts their vested interests. Such tendencies are tragic since both sides perpetuate discord and prevent any substantive collaboration.

In the book reviewed here, Carol Hill offers another crack at navigating the chasm between science and the Christian faith. Thus, Hill’s work is not necessarily novel or innovative. And it is certainly not the first to