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Drees, RELIGION, SCIENCE AND NATURALISM

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Here again is a stark exhibition of Oppy's unfortunate conflation between "N's being presented with a justification for accepting p," and "N's being irrational if he/she does not accept p."

In conclusion, it seems clear that an outstanding illustration of the sort of epistemic clumsiness that attends Oppy's analysis is afforded by his claim that many proponents of ontological arguments (e.g., Plantinga) "have conceded that these arguments are dialectically impotent" (p. 185). What Oppy has in mind here is Plantinga's cautionary note on p. 221 of *The Nature of Necessity* regarding Anselmian arguments (including, of course, his own). What Plantinga asserts there is that such arguments "cannot, perhaps, be said to *prove* or *establish* 'their conclusions" (Plantinga's italics). But how does that imply that ontological arguments are—in Oppy's words—"dialectically impotent?" (One can rest assured that Plantinga would concede no such 'thing.) Clearly, Oppy's view can only be (or entail) that a piece of deductive reasoning is "dialectically impotent" if it fails to be probative; i.e., fails to ensure that all rational persons presented with that reasoning would be intellectually perverse or irrational if they failed to accept it. But by that austere a standard, of course, virtually all arguments with philosophically interesting conclusions—not just ontological arguments—would turn out to be "worthless."

In closing, then, while there is little doubt that oppy's ambitious, comprehensive, and workmanlike book deserves thumbs up, his overall polemic against the dialectical efficacy of ontological arguments disappointingly suffers—or so it seems to me—from some serious epistemological confusion.

NOTES

1. One might appropriately contend that ontological arguments are as *such* essentially or inherently modal, and, accordingly, that it is somewhat puzzling to regard "Modal" arguments as a *type* of ontological argument. What Oppy seems to have in mind here, however, are those ontological arguments which make explicit use of the notions of necessity and possibility.
2. Cf. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," in Thomas V. Morris, *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 91-106.
3. Presumably, *the theists* to whom Oppy is referring here are those who would not accept theism solely on the basis of any ontological argument.

Religion, Science and Naturalism, by **Willem B. Drees**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi, 314. $59.95 (cloth).

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The author of this monograph, Prof. Willem Drees of the University of Twente in the Netherlands, is a rising star in European and American circles of scholarship concerned with religion and science. Drees has advanced degrees in physics and also two doctorates, in theology and philosophy. His earlier volume, *Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God* (1990) was well received. The present volume is a kind of *Habilitationschrift* in which Drees sets forth his perspective on the broad range of options concerning the relationship between religion and science.

Drees' basic thesis is that there is still a place for religion, even if in deference to the sciences we adopt a naturalistic worldview. Following P. F. Strawson, Drees accepts the distinction between "hard" and "soft" naturalism, opting for the "hard" variety. That is, his metaphysical worldview is reductionistic, atomistic and naturalistic. It is reductionistic because Drees asserts that all phenomena reduce to material objects and their interaction. Later he will add a deistic conception of God to his worldview. His viewpoint is atomistic because he thinks that physics is the most basic science, and that reality reduces to the smallest physical things and their interactions. Drees does allow, however, that "the description and explanation of phenomena may require concepts which do not belong to the vocabulary of fundamental physics" (16). Finally, it is naturalistic in this sense: the natural world is the whole of reality we know of and interact with. What then of religious faith? Religious belief comes from a consideration of the natural world as a whole (rather than from particular things and events in the world and history). Drees calls these "limit questions": "The questions which are left at the metaphorical 'last desk' are questions about the world as a whole, its existence and structure" (18). Drees rejects any rational belief in miracles or special revelation. He thus leaves us with a contemporary version of Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion, a kind of deism in modern dress.

The book begins with a review of the contemporary discussion, which is valuable and learned. Drees sets forth his own typology of relationships between religion and science, against the backdrop of current discussion. I found his typology less helpful than others I know of because it used odd, even confusing, catagories for analysis. The second section is a review of literature on the historical relationship between religion and science. Here, he is at odds with recent works which argue for a Christian backdrop to the rise of modern natural science. Drees is right, I think, to reject any apologetic claim that modern natural science could only have arisen in a Christian context. But he himself goes too far in suggesting that the Christian worldview had only a very limited role to play in the rise of modern science. Here the more modest claims of such well-known scholars as Whitehead and John Dillenberger are superior to Drees' rather anti-Christian *tendenz*.[1] In the third chapter, Drees looks at the theological implications of contemporary science, with special reference to our understanding of God. He rejects any rational belief in miracles, since this would violate the integrity of science. Instead, God is seen as the mystery of the world, an object of subjective faith which provides life with some sense of meaning and purpose. Along the way Drees attempts to uncouple any connection between critical realism in science (which he accepts) and in theology (which he rejects). The fourth chapter reviews recent discussions on religion and evolution.

Drees accepts an evolutionary worldview, and fits religion and morality into a social-scientific and evolutionary understanding of human society and psychology. The fifth and final chapter is a kind of round-up: he reflect upon the place of religion and morality given his naturalism. Here Drees combines the social functional views of Durkheim with the personal, psychological views of Schleiermacher to find some place for religious and moral perspectives within the confines of his naturalism. The final section of this last chapter is fittingly called, "Religions for wandering and wondering humans." If you could not have guessed already, Drees is a religious pluralist.

I admire Drees' learning, and the goal he has set for himself in this book. Scholars who are already familiar with the broad range of options and literature in the theology and science debate will find it useful. However, I do not recommend it to scholars in other fields. Drees' own perspective too strongly biases his presentation of theology and the philosophy of science for me to recommend this book as a first, or even second, source for knowledge of the growing religion-and-science debates.

I was in fact rather broadly disappointed by the lack of *argument* one finds in the book. Like many books of this sort, there are plenty of surveys of others people's arguments. But Drees himself simply assumes, for the most part, the truth of his own favorite prejudices. This is particularly onerous, since Drees adopts so many controversial and even dubious assumptions and assertions. Let's just take two examples. The present writer has done some work on the relationship between God and time. After considering the viewpoint I develop myself at length, along with several other viewpoints, Drees just writes "I consider none of these options viable" (263). To take another example, look at miracles. Drees just asserts (many times) that the integrity of science demands a rejection of miracles and of special revelation. But nowhere does one find any extended *argument* that this is the correct viewpoint. In the section on divine action, he discusses several scholars who do accept both natural science and the possibility of miracles. But he dismisses them with a wave of the hand: "The argument [in this case by Alston] undermines the integrity of science, both that of its methods and that of its results" (95). Yet such a claim needs careful substantiation, in light of the many philosophers who have argued to the contrary.[2] Drees in fact has a rather unsophisticated understanding of "law of nature" and of "miracle" from which even C.S. Lewis's popular arguments of the 1940's are an improvement. In the light of such opposition, a simple gesture toward the natural sciences and their supposed "integrity" simply will not do.

In fact, one major failing of this book is its lack of discussion of the philosophy of science, and in particular of the philosophy of physics. In fact, Drees seems rather contemptuous of the philosophy of science (e.g., 144). To exemplify his seeming ignorance of philosophy of science, consider this: "whereas in scientific realism the existence of an underlying reality is undisputed. . . in theology the existence of a corresponding realm remains disputed" (128). As a matter of fact, the existence of non-observed "objects" in the physical sciences is a realm of tremendous dispute in the philosophy of science throughout the last century. The debate between scientific realism and anti-realism in the philosophy of science just is a debate about the existence of unobserved entities. Such neglect of the philosophy of science is odd since Drees clearly wants us to take the sciences seriously. Perhaps it is easier to adopt the rather naive scientism of this book when complex and fundamental questions concerning the nature and limitations of natural science are overlooked.

Given the limitations of a review, we can take the time to examine only one of the unexamined assumptions Drees puts forth in this book. One major assumption is his belief that naturalism is the metaphysical result of taking the sciences seriously. In fact, the first sentence of the book is, "We need to be honest to science." I want to be honest to natural science and respect it, every bit as much as Drees. Yet I don't accept naturalism as a worldview. Why not?

I believe that naturalism is a rational worldview. It makes sense to believe that the natural world is all we know and interact with. But such a metaphysical commitment is not *simply* the result of taking the natural sciences seriously. Drees' assumption fails to reflect upon just what the natural sciences really *are*. The natural sciences have made progress since the time of Copernicus because they have abstracted from reality, and focused upon the measurable properties of material objects and (whenever possible) mathematical sentences ("laws") which describe the regularities of their interaction, along with models that sketch a limited picture of those interactions. The basic problem with Drees' scientism was pointed out by Whitehead in the 1920's:

> The disadvantage of exclusive attention to a group of abstractions, however well-founded, is that, by the nature of the case, you have abstracted from the remainder of things. In so far as the excluded things are important in your experience, your models of thought are not fitted to deal with them.[3]

Thus the central assumption of this book commits what Whitehead called the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The view that natural sciences yield naturalism mistakes the scope, power, and character of the natural sciences (as limited and abstracted from reality itself) for a full view of the whole of Reality — something they have never claimed to be of old, and in fact never have been. True, some famous philosophers have held that the natural sciences *are* a full view of the whole of reality. One example would be Bertrand Russell, who infamously claimed, "Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know."[4] But such scientism has fallen on hard times, most especially because of a proper emphasis on the limitations and true character of natural science, as abstracting from reality and representing our own limited interests in a partial "model" of the true world.[5]

It remains open for theists, therefore, to take the natural sciences as honestly and seriously as Drees does without accepting his deistic theology. Because natural science is abstract, limited, and guided by particular interests, it can and does ignore the questions of miracles. Science is neutral, in fact, with respect to the metaphysical assumptions Drees trumpets as the only proper respect we owe the natural sciences.

As a philosopher, in general, I found the lack of any serious defense of the basic presuppositions from which Drees surveys the field very disappointing. However, the volume is still useful, clear, learned and provides a helpful survey of recent discussion. Drees' own undefended biases, however, mar his interactions with the literature of religion and science.

NOTES

1. See A N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; New York: Mentor Books, 1948); and John Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science* (1960; Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1988).
2. See, *i.a.*, C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (1947; New York: Macmillan, 1978); R. G. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan, 1970); G. I. Mavrodes, "Miracles and Laws of Nature," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 333-346.
3. Whitehead, 58
4. *Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr., 1978), 243.
5. Three well-known books have helped make scientism unpopular: Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago, 1962); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1970) and Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Eng. trans., Boston: Beacon Pr., 1971). I have found particularly persuasive the work of Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1983).

The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith, ed. **Thomas D. Senor**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. Pp. x, 291. $39.95 (cloth).

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This is a collection of eleven original essays by leading American philosophers written in honor of William Alston. The essays are not necessarily about Alston's work (though some are); nor do they necessarily take up debates with which Alston has been closely involved (though most do). They are, however, united by a concern for the epistemology of religious belief, a subject to which Prof. Alston has made unsurpassed contributions over the last decade or so. It is not surprising, then, that Alston's is the most frequently cited name in the index. It is also noteworthy, and gives some sense of the book's orientation, that the next most-cited figure (with only one citation fewer than Alston himself) is John Hick.

The essays are divided into three groups, with the first group collected under the title "Natural Theology and the Knowledge of God." The first essay in this group, Marilyn McCord Adams' "Praying the