
REVIEWS

Eric Mount, Jr. *Covenant, Community and the Common Good*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999. Pp. xi + 188. ISBN: 0-8298-1355-1. \$19.95, paper.

Inspired by his work with the covenantal ethics interest group of the Society of Christian Ethics, Mount continues to develop themes found in his earlier *Professional Ethics in Context: Institutions, Images and Empathy*. In this book, Mount sets out “to explore the continuing importance of covenant, community and common good as relational and conceptual framers of moral discourse” (p. 6). In so doing, he identifies places where the covenantal tradition of the ancient Hebrew people converges with the common good tradition of the ancient Greeks. In fact, he concludes that the two traditions nicely complement one another. He observes, “In tandem, covenant and common good work well to offset the pitfalls of excessive individualism and a communitarianism that submerges difference. Covenant takes the common good personally; the common good can stretch a covenant universally” (p. 49).

Mount develops his argument for the continued vitality of these traditions in three stages. In the first (chapters one and two), he examines criticisms of both covenant and common good, acknowledges the rightness of their critics, but points out nuances within the traditions that provide neglected ways of avoiding the criticisms. For example, one criticism made of covenant language is that it can exclude the stranger. Mount observes, “one person’s promised land is another’s ancestral homeland” (p. 16). Nonetheless, he suggests that hospitality to the stranger, arguably the essence of covenant, provides a push toward inclusivity in covenant that balances a rhetoric of difference. Likewise, common good language is vulnerable to a variety of charges, including the complaint that it leads to abuses of power. Mount admits, “When the powerful define the common good, the powerless are subjected to it” (p. 32), yet

argues that the common good nonetheless provides resources for seeing others as “dialogue partners” rather than enemies. In the end, he proposes that the common good should be treated “more as a community *process* than a prearranged principle or a finished product” (p. 34, emphasis mine).

In the second stage of the argument, Mount applies covenant and common good perspectives to a variety of settings in order to display their continued promise. He looks at marriage and sex (chapter 3), work and welfare (chapter four) and global relations (chapter five). On the matter of sexual ethics, he argues that covenant language provides an alternative to what he calls the fundamentalisms of either natural law or biblical rules. Beginning with the vulnerability of the stranger, Mount suggests how someone working out of a covenantal/common good perspective would respond to questions of rape, sexual fidelity and homosexuality, among other related topics. On the matter of work, he demonstrates how sensitivity to covenant themes and concern for the common good can inform a definition of good work, help persons and society balance commitments to work and family, as well as support commitment to the less well-off members of our community. As to the possibilities of global community, Mount explores the possibilities inherent in a growing awareness that the earth is our commons and the growing recognition of universal human rights.

Mount concludes the book by identifying the virtues necessary to live in covenant for the sake of the common good. One is faith, understood as fidelity in relationships with the other. Another is hope, understood as active, patient participation in realizing the common good. The third virtue is love, understood as the compassionate ability to suffer with others and to work for justice. The final virtue is the kind of gratitude for what has been received that leads to public-

spiritedness.

As usual, Mount's writing is irenic and refreshingly easy to follow. The book would therefore be useful for upper level undergraduates as well as church groups. He offers creative and close readings of covenant and common good traditions, thus providing a way of rehabilitating and bringing new life to them. Mount comes off as an optimistic realist in that he does not wistfully long for a past age. He fully recognizes the challenges of individualism to our culture. At the same time, he does an excellent job of highlighting places where covenant and common good language seems to work effectively, thus keeping his work grounded in the practices of real people and communities. Mount's work is timely and sensible. It offers a way to acknowledge the strengths while avoiding the weaknesses of thinkers he identifies as classical liberals and sectarian communitarians (see pp. 2-3). Part social analysis and part constructive proposal, rooted in ancient traditions of thought and contemporary social practices, Mount offers an invitation to dialogue in community that is well worth taking up.

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Carlo Vinti, *Michael Polanyi: Conoscenza scientifica e immaginazione creativa*. Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1999. Pp. 210. ISBN 88-382-3817-0.

Carlo Vinti is professor of philosophy at the University of Perugia, Italy, and the present volume aims not only at introducing Polanyi to the Italian intellectual scene but is also a critical review situating him in the context of personalist philosophy.

Professor Vinti is well qualified for his task because he was educated in the personalist school of Serafini and Rigobello. He has undertaken an extensive research project on Polanyi's texts and is currently working to computerise archival material from the University of Chicago, which should open up new avenues of research.

The present volume is lucidly written in three parts: first, an introduction to Polanyi's thought that occupies more than a hundred pages; second, the translation of two texts into Italian, namely on creative imagination and on scientific understanding; and third, lines of research for further development. The author's starting point is to place Polanyi within the contemporary discussion on the philosophy of science, contrasting his ideas particularly with Foucault's "death of the subject." He sees Polanyi as having broken through the dualisms between psychology and logic, explanation and understanding, historicism and analysis, and facts and values. He brings out the failures, indeed the misery as he calls it, of a critical philosophy that divides and separates the person possessing knowledge from what he or she knows. He pays close attention to the community aspects of personal understanding in order to show how a commonly held ontology can be achieved in society.

His third section, of only twenty five pages, is a brief but provocative suggestion of work still to be done, of lines of research opened up by Polanyi's philosophy. Issues indicated as requiring attention are the relationship of Polanyi to the following: modern thought in the form of the challenge from the Frankfurt school and post-Popperian epistemology; classical philosophy, especially Plato and Augustine; post-neopositivism; the personalist tradition and how it fits with science; neodarwinism and its objections to the idea of levels of reality; the mind-body problem; religious experience and theological reflection; and art, psychology and pedagogy. As can easily be seen, this is a wide ranging, many faceted approach to Polanyi that always returns to the importance of the person as its focal point.

The present small but penetrating volume places Polanyi firmly within the personalist tradition. It will be useful for all who are interested in seeing where Polanyi fits in Continental thought. It has two great merits. First, the exposition in the first part is clear, logical, and philosophically competent in a way well suited to familiarising new readers with the subject. Second, the lines of research suggest horizons still to

be explored. Among Vinti's original insights is his idea that persons can best be described in Polanyi as explorers of the universe, "L'uomo come esploratore" (p. 114-118).

Michael Polanyi is number 28 in the collection *Interpretazioni* edited by Armando Rigobello. It is satisfying to see that Polanyi has been able to take his place among those the Italians consider the important philosophers of the twentieth century.

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John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. Pp. xiii + 221. \$18. ISBN 0-8133-3878-6.

This innovative and daring book is a welcome contribution to the dialogue between Christian theology and the evolutionary sciences. Haught explores the ontological issues that underlie these disciplines and attempts to articulate a doctrine of God as Creator of an evolving universe. He begins by urging us to move beyond both the "intelligent design" arguments (based on classical metaphysics) and the materialist philosophy of many scientists (such as Dennett and Dawkins), because neither of these options offers a suitable *ultimate* explanation of the world. In the second chapter, he describes Darwin's "dangerous" ideas, and notes in chapter three that theology has often responded by ignoring or vehemently denying scientific theories about human ancestors and natural selection.

Haught argues in chapter four that Darwin actually provided theology a gift – the opportunity to rethink the God-world relation in a way that is more adequate to biblical faith, to leave behind the dualism that has plagued theology for centuries. He suggests that the classical "hierarchical" vision of the world, expressed by the "Great Chain of Being" model, does not fit with a molecular and historical view of an evolving universe. Nevertheless, Haught argues in

chapter five that theology may refigure its hierarchical vision by viewing God as the source of information at an abstract level, making logical space for a link between God and an evolving world. He sees the metaphysical intuitions of Teilhard de Chardin and A. N. Whitehead as our best hope for a more adequate ultimate explanation.

Chapter six outlines an alternative metaphysical framework, a "God for Evolution." Here we find the most interesting and promising proposal of Haught's book, a "Metaphysics of the Future." He builds on the work of theologians like Pannenberg, but notes that many discoveries in the science of complexity have also opened up new space for such conclusions. This is central to the book, so let me offer some quotations. "Evolution... seems to require a divine source of being that resides not in a timeless present located somewhere 'up above,' but in the future, essentially 'up ahead,' as the goal of a world still in the making" (84). "...the novel informational possibilities that evolution has available to it arise from the always dawning future... Evolution is rendered possible only because of the temporal clearing made available when the future faithfully introduces relevant new possibilities" (87). "...all things receive their being from out of an inexhaustibly resourceful 'future' that we may call 'God'" (90). Haught argues that this metaphysics can provide an ultimate theological explanation for the realities of contingency, law and time.

Haught puts his metaphysics of the future to work by addressing one of the most difficult of theological issues in chapter seven, "Evolution, Tragedy and Cosmic Purpose." The well-known problem of evil has rendered the idea of a divine designer (or planner) problematic, all the more so now that evolution paints a picture of millions of years of suffering. Haught encourages an insertion of reflection on the cross and the kenotic God of love directly into theological-scientific discussion, where the dialogue has often remained at the abstract level of the "divine." For Haught, the biblical view of God suggests that the future is the modality of being from which that which is most real arrives, namely, the promise of God. The Creation

of the self-emptying God of love is a “letting be” of an evolving world.

Chapter eight continues exploring the explanatory power of the metaphysics of the future. Rejecting the dualism of matter and spirit (wherein ethics requires escaping to the “spiritual”) and the traditional formulation of “original” sin, Haught borrows from aspects of process thought in order to propose that God’s vulnerable love is the ultimate theological grounding for an evolving cosmos in which free human creatures emerge and are called to orient themselves to the coming kingdom of God. In a similar way, chapters nine and ten apply this metaphysics to the issues of ecology and divine action respectively. Haught concludes by urging the reader to think of nature no longer as “design” but as “promise.” As with all innovative and daring proposals, readers may well find aspects of Haught’s book challenging and disconcerting, and it is precisely for this reason that I recommend it highly.

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Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy and H. Newton Malony, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*. Theology and the Sciences. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. Pp. xv + 252. ISBN: 0-8006-3141-2. \$19.00, paper.

This book was inspired by lectures on the topic of psychology and theology given by Malcolm Jeeves at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1995, which then led to a series of follow-up conferences funded by the John Templeton Foundation. A conviction emerged from those discussions that it is possible to present a view of human nature that is “reconcilable and congruent” with a range of scientific, theological and philosophical perspectives. This volume of essays attempts to develop further and defend that commitment (xiii). The contributors, four of whom are on faculty at Fuller, comprise an interdisciplinary panel made up of a theo-

logian (Ray Anderson), a philosopher (Nancey Murphy), an evolutionary biologist (Francisco J. Ayala), a geneticist (V. Elving Anderson), a New Testament scholar (Joel B. Green), three psychologists (Warren S. Brown, Malcolm Jeeves and H. Newton Maloney), and a medical ethicist (Stephen G. Post).

All nine authors share a commitment to a position that Murphy calls “non-reductive physicalism,” a view that resonates with Polanyi’s understandings of emergence. As Murphy defines the term, she notes that non-reductive physicalism agrees with the many scientists and philosophers who think that we do not need to appeal to nonmaterial entities such as soul or mind in order to explain distinctively human traits. At the same time, the term is intended to resist the tendency to say that a person is “nothing but a body” (2). Non-reductive physicalism thus contrasts with three other views (24-25): a radical dualism that identifies person with soul or mind, something separable from the body; a holistic dualism that argues that personhood refers to the gestalt while being constituted by many separable parts; and a reductive materialism that equates personhood with physiology and thus expects the physical sciences eventually to be able to explain emotions, morality and religious experience.

Murphy opens the book with an historical survey in which she offers synopses of how human nature has been viewed in western philosophy, early Christian sources, the early modern sciences, the philosophy of mind, recent science and recent biblical and theological scholarship. Located after this survey are two chapters each devoted to biological and psychological considerations. A key theme that unites these essays is that distinctive human capacities (as measured primarily against primates) emerge from biological underpinnings. For example, Ayala, while eschewing attempts to establish moral norms by reading them off of evolutionary developments, nevertheless argues that the possibilities of and need for ethics arises out of the larger brains and ensuing “enhanced intelligence” that are naturally selected in human beings. Thus, biology is necessary, but not sufficient for understanding the ethical dimension of human experience. In like manner,

Anderson argues that our genetic code provides a necessary but not sufficient basis for many facets of human physiology and behavior. Analogously, Jeeves argues that mind emerges from brain physiology and Brown argues that what we call “soul” (defined as the capacity for personal relatedness) emerges from our biologically-rooted cognitive capacities.

In the following essay, Murphy reflects on some of the philosophical questions raised by these positions (e.g., the nature and type of reductionism and the epistemological status of non-reductive physicalism) and offers an understanding of religious experience based on non-reductive physicalism. The next two essays turn to explicitly religious accounts of human nature. Although this statement oversimplifies their analysis, both Green and Anderson show that the biblical writings tend toward a view of human nature as a psychosomatic unity rather than a dualism of body and soul. Prior to Brown’s concluding recap of the book, Post offers an ethical assessment of both dualism and non-reductive physicalism, suggesting that the former is, at best, morally ambiguous and that the latter does not compromise anything essential to Christian ethics.

The book works effectively as a programmatic piece that makes a strong case for non-reductive physicalism and its compatibility with at least some of the sciences, philosophy and Christian faith. The authors write clearly and provide concise summaries of important historical and scientific developments. The book also contains an extensive bibliography to guide further study. Unlike some discussions of human nature, authors in this volume (Ayala and Post) address the often forgotten matter of the politics of anthropology, warning against the tendency to justify certain political and moral arrangements by rooting them in “human nature.” Their discussion could profitably be extended to develop a more extended critique of the likely ideo-political consequences of nonreductive physicalism. One other way in which the positions taken in the book might profitably be extended is by using dolphins, rather than primates, as the touchstone for understanding human distinctiveness, since recent

research suggests that dolphins have much greater capacities from communication than primates.

Nevertheless, the scope of interdisciplinary convergence is inspiring and the arguments convincing. Regardless of how widely accepted the arguments become, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* deserves to set the terms for future discussion, at least for those who see the importance of placing the sciences and theology in dialog with one another on the topic of human nature.

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Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999. Pp. xiv+300. \$49.95 ISBN: 0-567-08683-6.

In a rather straightforward, no-nonsense volume, Alister McGrath has made a substantial contribution to the study of Thomas F. Torrance. McGrath’s intellectual biography of Torrance does not rely upon winsome prose or provocative, personal exposés to accomplish its main objective: to set forth Torrance’s understanding of the complementarity of the natural sciences and theology and of the major themes of Christian theology which contribute to that relation. The book is meticulously researched and well-argued, drawing upon unpublished writings and correspondence.

Initially, McGrath became interested in Torrance as McGrath sought a way to relate his early scientific work in molecular biology with his theological interests. He reports that he was generally disappointed in the facile and naïve manner in which theologians tended to deal with science. However, Torrance’s mastery of dogmatics and the philosophy of science was especially impressive. Torrance was able to see both theology and science in light of the other, and so forge an integrated understanding of science and theology as having to do with the same reality in different ways. McGrath comments, “Torrance writings were, quite simply, of landmark significance. . . . It seemed that Torrance was one of the few — indeed, perhaps even the

only — writer to appreciate the fundamental importance of *methodological* issues in relation to this dialogue [between science and religion]” (p. xii).

McGrath has put his finger on precisely the main reason why Torrance is at once so important and so confoundingly difficult to understand. It is also one of the primary reasons why Torrance’s reception among theologians has been respectable but muted. Methodology is not sexy. It is rather abstract and technically complicated, and Torrance’s dense style of writing does little to assuage the challenge or make methodology more appealing. Furthermore, Torrance does not approach methodological questions from the currently fashionable postmodern hermeneutic but rather from what may appear to be a rather stodgy appeal to orthodoxy. But the fact is that methodology is fundamental to disciplinary and intellectual coherence, and Torrance’s contribution to our understanding of epistemology, both theological and scientific, has paved the way for a rich and mutually enhancing interaction between the two. Furthermore, Torrance’s attempt to plumb the depths of orthodoxy reveals it to be inherently dynamic, polyphonic, and trenchant. Torrance’s rediscovery and appropriation of orthodox realism wields a critical force upon all human assumptions and knowledge that outstrips even the most fervent of postmodern skeptics.

As I have noted, McGrath’s intellectual biography of Torrance is all too straightforward. If one is hoping to find a thorough-going confrontation between Torrance and his critics, or if one is eager to see the practical consequences of the engagement of science and theology (e.g., the development of scientific or theological ethics), one should look elsewhere. The book is solely focused on demonstrating “the coherence and significance of Torrance’s conception of ‘scientific theology’” (p. xiv). This McGrath accomplishes competently with exacting precision.

McGrath’s exposition is divided into two sections. The first third of the text is a biographical narrative that traces Torrance’s life from childhood through twenty-nine years at New College, Edinburgh, as Pro-

fessor of Church History and Professor of Church Dogmatics. The story concentrates upon the external details of the significant relationships and faculty appointments and includes many photographs from Torrance’s life. There are extended passages within this first section in which McGrath lays out the chronological markers of many of Torrance’s most significant insights. These markers can become rather tedious reading, especially given the systematic development of the ideas in the second section. But they are important given one of McGrath’s underlying purposes in the book. McGrath aims to acknowledge the close relationship of Torrance to Karl Barth, but also to show how Torrance was not only one of the most able and accurate interpreters of Barth, but one who diverged from and developed beyond Barth as well. Over and over, McGrath contends that Torrance was an appreciative but critical student of Barth who later became a master, if not Barth’s equal, in his own right. The evidence he uncovers for his case is substantial. Not only is McGrath intimately familiar with Torrance’s published and unpublished writing, he also draws upon his conversations with Torrance’s friends and family as well as with Torrance himself. Additionally, McGrath provides an erudite commentary on the major British and German theologians and about some political intrigue within British theological schools.

In the latter two-thirds of the exposition, McGrath lays out the contours of Torrance’s scientific theology. Although Barth figures prominently in Torrance’s theological development, McGrath draws our attention to the vast range of the Christian tradition from which Torrance draws. Deftly, McGrath traces the intellectual moorings of Torrance’s thought past Augustine to the very heart of orthodox Nicene theology as expressed in Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. It is here in patristic theology that Torrance finds the unitive antidote to the dualism of Augustine, the all-important concept of the *homoousion*. As one would anticipate, the Reformation and especially John Calvin constitute a fundamental contribution to a critical realist theological hermeneutic.

In the last chapter of the book, McGrath traces Torrance's conception of natural theology. McGrath suggests that this is the most significant point of difference from Barth (197). Early on, Torrance was influenced by Scottish and British realism and by writers such as Daniel Lamont and Hugh Ross Mackintosh, both of whom were very appreciative of the natural sciences. After spending a year with Barth in Switzerland, Torrance was appointed to a faculty position at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York. There he engaged an ongoing "ferocious intellectual battle" over the relation between science and Christian theology. In his Auburn lectures, one will find ample evidence of Torrance's emerging conviction of the unitary nature of reality, and of the complementary relation between theology and science as ways of approaching the created order. According to McGrath, these were points over which Torrance repeatedly engaged Barth, encouraging him to attend to the convergences between science and theology.

Also in the last chapter, McGrath acknowledges the close affinity between Torrance and Michael Polanyi. McGrath explicitly takes to task Colin Weightman, who argued in *Theology in a Polanyian Universe: The Theology of Thomas Torrance* that Torrance grounded his theology in Polanyi's perspective. Dating Torrance's use of Polanyi's ideas to the early 1960's, long after Torrance developed his fundamental approach to theology, McGrath contends that Torrance did not wholly adopt Polanyi's philosophical perspective but rather found it to be illuminative of his ideas, especially with respect to Polanyi's commitment to realism and his appreciation of the fiduciary nature of faith. In my view, McGrath is closer to stating the truth of the matter than Weightman, but still I believe he understates Torrance's indebtedness to Polanyi's epistemology. It seems to me, Polanyi gave Torrance a language and conceptual framework with which Torrance could articulate the *epistemological* contours of a scientific theology. He was able to address more directly the methodological transformation that modern theology must undergo if it is to be scientifically viable. For example, on the matter of tacit knowledge and the hierarchical structuring of the universe, it is not

enough to say that Polanyi merely "stimulated Torrance's theological reflections" (232). In many of his writings, Torrance acknowledges his indebtedness to Polanyi and adopts Polanyian language to explain the concepts and their implications for theology. "Personal knowledge" gave Torrance a means by which to affirm the unitary nature of reality and also account for the irreducible, bipolar interpenetration of material and spiritual dimensions. Torrance found in Polanyi a way to talk with scientists in their own language and to develop theology with greater scientific precision.

McGrath's intellectual biography of Torrance is an important and extremely useful introduction. Despite its scholarly depth and precision, and without detracting from its worth, I think it misses a vital ingredient. Undoubtedly, no book can fulfill every expectation, but nevertheless, I believe an important opportunity might have been missed. A biography should do more than trace the externals of a person's history and thought. It should delve into the personality, the personhood, of the person. Specifically, given the access to Torrance that McGrath enjoyed, one would want him to explore the early experiences and underlying, subterranean motivations that formed the tacit basis out of which beliefs emerge and commitments are forged. I wanted McGrath to serve as the voice through which we might hear Torrance reflect upon his formative experiences, answering the questions about why realism and scientific investigation became so all-important for him. Such a personal exploration would be invaluable to help us understand better the basic simplicity and profundity of Torrance's mind and approach. It would most certainly help a postmodern generation identify within their own experiences the tacit basis upon which they, too, might overcome dualistic thinking and affirm the ultimate unity of life before God.

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