

Each contributor grapples seriously with the methodological and substantive issues in a field that is emerging from the margins of several overlapping academic discourses. In an academic climate of overspecialization this can only be a good thing. Anyone working in the comparative philosophy of religion will know the problems scholars face in describing their project(s) to their peers and to the public. The movement towards definition and critical self-understanding realized by this collection should make that task a good deal easier.

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Nature, Reality, and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion. By Langdon Gilkey. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. ISBN 0-8006-2754-7. Pp. xii+245.

Given the title of Gilkey's offering, one is led to believe that he is out to provide a wide-ranging view of the world in which religion and science would effectively be connected. Gilkey does not, however, supply such an overarching cosmology. Rather, his intention is to convey certain intimations of sacrality in nature, as well as in other aspects of reality, and how science qua science fails to recognize them.

Gilkey opens by stressing that nature cannot be understood in exclusively religious or scientific categories. To adopt an either-or methodology is irresponsible in Gilkey's estimation and stems from a positivistic orientation of science or a strict adherence to religious tradition (12). If either discipline monopolizes what can be known about reality, it commits what Alfred North Whitehead referred to as "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (15), where the abstract is mistaken for the concrete. In actuality neither religion nor science establishes an exhaustive and completely reliable account of the universe, for there are "other modes of knowing such as aesthetic [and] intuitive" (2). Either approach mistakenly leads not to "careful inquiry" but to dogmatism, and hence neither properly conducts the business of its own discipline (13–16).

Gilkey subdivides his investigation into three parts. The first two deal with religion and science *vis-à-vis* reality and then nature; the third is devoted to an examination of the sacred in nature. In his initial section Gilkey distinguishes two varieties of realism—one "critical" and the other "naïve," indicative of the scientific community (36). For Gilkey, critical realism correctly illumines "experience and knowing [as] response[s] to an external world" (214, n. 33). In the case of naïve realism, scientific explanation leaves no room for mystery, and any competing explanations are rendered suspect (50–1).

According to naturalistic science, nature is the real, prompting science to regard itself as holding a mirror up to nature (14). This type of science imagines itself as self, recognizing neither that it deals in abstractions nor that philosophy as "the critic of abstractions" can inform it (53). Yet Gilkey insists that it is sufficient that the empirical method does not have a lock on knowledge, since valuable insights can be obtained by other means, including "interior self-aware-

ness,...[and] personal and communal awareness of the other" (86). The kind of information these avenues can yield furnish Gilkey with the "four major categories in terms of which nature has been and is experienced and known" (87); they are nature as power, life, order, and producing redemptive unity. Gilkey contests that these "represent 'traces' or 'signs' of the sacred within nature" (87). In his appraisal Gilkey receives support for his claims from the wisdom he finds in archaic religions. For them, nature was filled with sacredness and became a vehicle for the transcendent (102).

The remainder of Gilkey's volume is reserved for heightening ecological sensibilities—something for which science reveals itself ambiguous. Technology as applied science is in the service of humans but also works to their detriment; for humans are part of nature and are dependent on it but current technologies threaten this delicate balance (143, 147). With the desacralization of nature came also the loss of its power and value, and this led to human dominance, mastery, and control over nature by technological license (146). Gilkey attempts to reverse this trend by proposing that nature be viewed as "a creature of God...just as we are" and hence *imago Dei*. This would help reinstate the perception of nature as sign and symbol with inherent value (150).

As professional scientists who write on religion and science become (with very few exceptions) amateur philosopher-theologians, Gilkey undertakes the opposite task—he is a theologian who attempts to be conversant in areas of science. He is largely successful in this pursuit, displaying a dual competence uncommon among those taking on a similar role.

Upon reflection one may wonder about the way Gilkey draws often and approvingly from Whitehead, particularly in his depiction of God (203). My reservation here is the degree to which one can borrow from another's ideas without largely endorsing them. Knowing where Gilkey stands in relation to Whitehead would assist us in knowing how to respond to his argument. Otherwise we are left not knowing whether we are interacting with Gilkey's or Whitehead's intentions. If Gilkey's views indeed have recently paralleled or even converged with Whitehead's, we can expect his subsequent work to reflect further philosophical and theological reformulation.

Overall I can recommend the book highly, as long as the reader comes with no illusions as to what it accomplishes. Based on the title, one may be prompted to comment that he has taken on too much in the allotted space. Nature, reality, and the sacred are topics too complex for such brief treatment. And in terms of the subtitle, Gilkey hints at the promise of a connection to be fashioned among the three, though this is achieved only in part. What we discover—the extent to which the sacred pierces through nature and reality to our consciousness—is a plea on the part of the author for self-sacrifice; and environmental concern that nature should be cared for as though it were sacred, or at least images the divine. With this mentality in place we may salvage what remains of nature. Yet a work that covers the ground suggested by the title would be massive, and Gilkey does not endeavor to complete such a task. His is the more modest one of ecological appreciation and its religious implications.