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Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology by Charley D. Hardwick

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physics" (p. 122) and to seek ways to wager our lives concretely on "the Spirit's empowerment to love and heal" the human neighbor and the nonhuman world (p. 84).

ALEXANDER IRWIN, *Harvard University*.

HARDWICK, CHARLEY D. *Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xvi+309 pp. \$54.95 (cloth).

One question is repeatedly raised in our postmodern horizon: what is the foundational conceptual structure that really animates our philosophy and theology? For Charley Hardwick, some form of naturalism, defined by him as an "austere physicalist" (p. xi) version, has emerged out of the sustained deconstructive reflection of the past four centuries. This form of naturalism, which privileges the basic objects of mathematical physics as the realities that truly exist, operates in an often unacknowledged way in theology and biblical scholarship insofar as these disciplines have come to reject supernaturalism and a providential or teleological understanding of the world. Yet Hardwick also argues that the traditional Christian categories, such as those of resurrection, sin, grace, and those embedded in christology, can still find purchase in his physicalist naturalism through the bridge of existentialism.

How does this seeming slight of hand work? Hardwick takes Rudolf Bultmann's approach to the existential structures of the self to be normative for understanding our openness to the future as a constitutive feature of our understanding of the world. This openness to the future has its grounding in the suprahuman (but not supernatural) domain of creative transformation as envisioned by Henry Nelson Wieman, who provides a kind of axiological foundation for the anthropology of existentialism. The radical openness of the *dasein* in the mode of faith is supported by events of grace that are not human projections or imaginative ideals. These events of grace emerge from nature (since for naturalism the concept of the nonnatural is absurd) as sign-events. These special sign-events are religious insofar as they give us a profound readiness for transformation, the naturalist form of grace.

Does God exist for Hardwick? Yes and no. The phrase "God exists" has no direct referent and its object is thus not part of the inventory of the universe (as an implication of his physicalism). Yet it is possible to assert that God "could exist" and that we encounter all that we need of the divine in those events of grace that are immediately present to us. In affirming Wieman's position, Hardwick asserts, "God is known, therefore, solely in events of grace" (p. 150). An ontology of God, such as those developed by Paul Tillich or Robert C. Neville, cannot satisfy the form of Occam's razor that physicalist naturalism applies to all claims about structures or powers that are not part of the immediate phenomenology of grace. Rather, a valuational model, grounded in the determinacy of value within creative natural events, supplants ontology as the foundation for theology.

Many theologians reject naturalism because it seems to deny meaning and cosmic purpose. Process theology, which still clings to panpsychism and some belief in everlasting values (both rejected by Hardwick), further confuses the issue by allowing far more scope for teleology than is appropriate in the neo-Darwinian synthesis. Hardwick wants to reject objective and subjective immortality as well as the idea that values are somehow entertained in a kind of divine mind.

Should all nonphysicalist language be translated into the foundational lan-

guage of mathematical physics? For Hardwick, it is important that each language structure retain autonomy insofar as it has some kind of status that is not purely subjective. This latter stipulation puts him at odds with those Wittgensteinians who misuse the concept of “language games” to avoid the issue of objective value. Nonphysicalist languages are objective when they are rooted in emergent natural value.

The import of this carefully woven analysis is that it strengthens the case for some form of naturalism in the postmodern horizon. While process theology has failed to develop a compelling analysis of nature and the more narcissistic and subjective forms of postmodernism have driven nature into almost total eclipse, it is important that a radical and capacious concept of nature be unfolded beneath theology. It is not clear that Hardwick’s brilliantly delineated physicalist naturalism has the categorial resources to transform theological discourse. Hardwick even hints at the very end of the book that his physicalism might be pointing toward a profound critique of the valuational stance of Christianity (cf. p. 290). That is, there may well be an inner dynamism in a resurgent naturalism that points toward a post-Christian horizon that is still profoundly religious. Hardwick’s apologetic task locates itself in one nexus where the postmodern horizon has experienced a crises in its categorial structures, namely where meanings must find purchase in a nonmental universe that seems ungenial to human need. Can his physicalism encompass the scope of nature’s innumerable unfoldings? Other forms of naturalism would have to answer with a reluctant “no.”

ROBERT S. CORRINGTON, *Drew Theological School*.

SCHROEDER, W. WIDICK. *Toward Belief: Essays in the Human Sciences, Social Ethics, and Philosophical Theology*. Chicago: Exploration Press, 1996. xiii+541. \$34.95 (cloth).

This volume by W. Widick Schroeder contains a collection of nineteen essays spanning a period of twenty-four years. The majority of this material has appeared previously in other publications, and, therefore, as the author notes in the introduction, the essays “were written to be read independently” (p. 9). Combining these essays into a single volume has not significantly altered this fact since the essays have undergone very little rewriting.

There are three essays that appear for the first time in this volume. “Religious Institutions and Social Change” presents both a theory of social change informed by process philosophy and suggests the role religious institutions should play in society. In “The Neo-Orthodox Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich,” Schroeder undertakes to compare and contrast Tillich’s and Whitehead’s ideas of God. However, the most valuable of the new essays, I believe, is “Human Rights: A Process Interpretation.” This chapter is a welcome addition to the literature on process political thought, although in the end I find the argument unpersuasive. Schroeder identifies three principles of distributive justice—freedom informed by excellence, equality appropriate to form, and order/peace/harmony—that he grounds respectively in the “dynamic, formal, and unifying facets of the becoming of a creature” (p. 79). Crucial to Schroeder’s theory is his association of the principle of freedom informed by excellence with Whitehead’s Principle of Creativity. This premise is not argued for but asserted arbitrarily. He then infers that freedom is the *constitutive* principle of justice and relegates the other two principles to the diminished status of *regulative* principles. The Category of Freedom