
Book Review

Patrick Curry, *Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1st edn, 2019), 152 pp., \$35 (pbk), ISBN: 9781782506096.

This is an important, beautifully written book. Philosopher Patrick Curry notes that his 'purpose in writing this book was to better understand and appreciate enchantment and perhaps, in sharing it, to help others do so too' (p. 11). He starts by asking the reader to think about enchantment. He gives some examples, one of which is: 'walking through a landscape charged with mystery' (p. 7). He concludes that enchantment is the experience of wonder. He tells the reader that most of his book will focus on 'radical enchantment', the joy and wonder that give life meaning. As someone who has written my own book, *A Sense of Wonder Towards Nature* (2019), I agree with Curry when he notes that appreciating enchantment means respecting its integrity. Wonder should not be dissected and rationalized; it should be accepted. Curry points out that almost anything can enchant us. He also considers why enchantment matters, concluding that 'Sometimes enchantment makes life worth living. It can even be life-changing' (p. 8). I would add that this is why moments of enchantment can stay fresh in our hearts all our lives. As Curry notes, enchantment can show us profound truths, lead to deep values, and be central to a life well-lived.

Curry also reminds us that its opposite exists—disenchantment—for enchantment has strong enemies. Disenchantment leads to boredom and nihilism, while enchantment leads to deeper meaning. Curry notes that enchantment only lasts for a certain moment, hence its poignancy. My own deep moments of enchantment confirm this poignancy, or as Curry says 'Every "hello" of wonder is shadowed by a "goodbye"' (p. 9). Curry notes his work will primarily focus on the enchantment of individual lives. He also notes that rationalism can be a problem for being enchanted, as it seeks an explanation for what is inherently a mystery. As a poet myself, I think this is a perfect explanation for the Muse. Where does it come from? Mystery always eludes too much analysis.

Curry also notes, 'Perhaps more than anything else, enchantment is a matter of relationship' (p. 13). He notes the words of J.R.R. Tolkien that enchantment is 'a love and respect for all things, "animate" and "inanimate", an unpossessive love of them as "other"' (p. 13). He notes that in contrast, 'false enchantment' desires to possess the other. I share with Curry a fascination with the writings of Tolkien, and he discusses the term 'Faerie' which he describes as where we find ourselves when we are enchanted. He also touches on an aspect of enchantment, its poignancy. While the effects of enchantment may live with us always, the moments of deep enchantment

are often fleeting. As Curry notes, 'For enchantment is wild and unbidable', it comes when it will, not at our demand, or as Curry concludes 'it can be invited but never commanded' (p. 15).

Curry considers the words of explorer Freya Stark, that the best attitude towards enchantment is 'fearless receptivity', which is a paying attention to the here and now. As Curry explains, this is not in fact easy. We cannot control enchantment, nor call it, for it comes when it will. I would note that we can, however, be open to it through respect, reciprocity, and listening. Curry explains that 'the ultimate source of enchantment, no matter how sophisticated, refined or complex, is nature' (p. 17). This is true even when the enchantment is a human artwork, for humans too are natural beings.

One of the strengths of Curry's book is that as a philosopher he plucks quotes and insights from many philosophers and scholars that touch on enchantment. This adds to the depth of the book, for it rightly shows that enchantment has been with us always, and people have been deeply pondering this as a key part of seeking meaning. Whether Tolkien pondering unpossessive love or Aldous Huxley wondering about Being and Becoming, these insights add to the book immensely. He also touches on the Australian Indigenous 'Dreaming', which he describes as a 'kind of continuous present' where our joys gathered by living live on (p. 20). As an ecocentric scientist I also find Curry's discussion of science of interest. He sees this largely as a process of mastery. He notes how enchantment relates to this: 'Since enchantment cannot be mastered and isn't interested in being master, it just gets bored and wanders off to look for something better' (p. 21). This is a lovely way of exposing the ethical bankruptcy of the anthropocentrism that dominates much of our world.

Curry has chapters on the enchantment of love and the enchantment of art (of which the discussion of stories and poetry is intriguing). He also has a chapter on religion which Curry describes as 'both one of our most potent means of enchantment and one of its chief enemies' (p. 57). Enchantment is often at the heart of religion; however, many formal religions seek to control that enchantment, hence why Curry argues religion can be both enchanting and disenchanting. He also has chapters on 'food and drink', 'learning', and (for me of key interest) 'nature'. Curry rightly argues it is a 'dangerous nonsense to dream of "conquering nature"' as this would amount to ecocide and our collective suicide (p. 81). Curry argues that 'It follows that the only sane definition of civilisation is the graceful accommodation and, when possible, celebration, of nature' (p. 81). He argues such a way of life wouldn't itself amount to enchantment, but it would leave plenty of room for it. Curry speaks of what I have been lucky to experience with animals, the moment when: 'one looks in the other's eyes and sees, and at the same moment is seen as, another person, with all that that entails: subjectivity, sentience and the capacity for suffering and joy' (p. 81). He discusses the power of place as well as "'animism", meaning a disciplined habit of staying open to personhood, subjectivity and agency whenever, wherever and in whatever form one encounters it' (p. 92). Curry describes animism as the 'sanest kind of religion' (p. 92).

Curry also has chapters on 'disenchantment' and 'technoscience', but he finishes the book with 'Enchantment as a way of life'. Curry (rightly in my view) concludes disenchantment is spreading, but that enchantment is always there if we are open to it, arguing that '...the most and best one can do is to create, whether individually or collectively, inviting conditions for enchantment in whatever field and walk of life, and then let it do its thing, perform its wonders if and as it will' (p. 123).

Curry concludes the book by stating, 'We can attend to it, allow it to happen, and help the wonder of the world to become real. Then we become real in turn' (p. 126). Indeed, this book helps us to consider the enchantment in our lives—and how we can foster it.

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