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Adventure in Human Knowledges and Beliefs, by Andrew Ralls Woodward. Hamilton Books, 2014. 106 pp., no illustrations. Pb. $12. ISBN: 0761864083

Reviewed by Jonathan Strand, Concordia University of Edmonton, jonathan.strand@concordia.ab.ca

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Aimed at a popular-level audience, this little book seeks to help readers explore the nature and relationship between religious and scientific beliefs and knowledge. It aims to facilitate its readers becoming effective "adjudicators" between legitimate and illegitimate beliefs and knowledge claims. Readers are led through the "adventure" of thinking through the issues for themselves and offered select insights from contemporary scholarship as tools to use in the endeavour. Readers are strongly advised to "tak[e] a *neutral, dispassionate,* and *unbiased* look at [their] own world views whether they be a science or a religion" (3).

Drawing on philosophers of science Thomas Kuhn, Michael Polanyi, and Karl Popper, religious studies scholars Ninian Smart and Donald Wiebe, sociologists Berger and Luckmann, as well as Robert McCauley, Woodward presents analyses of knowledge, belief, science, and religion. For example:

There are fundamentally different types of knowledge: "usually the term *knowledge* is used to characterize the products or content of the natural science and engineering disciplines," while "*belief* […] is […] used to characterize the products or content of religions" (5). But "religion can be a type of knowledge (although a very different type of knowledge from scientific knowledge)" (5) and "scientific epistemology" is commended as "an *attitude of mind* […] of being open to modification of one's world view" (15). In contrast, religious knowledge is "a type of knowledge that does *not* seem to be open to change" (20). Thus, "a conflict between religion and science is inevitable" (50). Readers are encouraged to "take a step 'outside' religion so that we can see what is happening 'inside' religion" (15).

Woodword notes that "knowledge claims about an empirical world, such as the 'world' of biology, can be proven or disproven" (19). Religion, according to Woodward, involves "*belief* about a trans-empirical world" (18) and, he adds, "a trans-empirical world is a world that we cannot describe and cannot model […]. [W]e also cannot prove or disprove the existence of a trans-empirical world" Religion, according to

Woodward, involves "*belief* about a trans-empirical world" (18). Nevertheless, "we can receive meaning and purpose in our lives from *believing* that our postulation—of the existence of a superhuman power—is a legitimate postulation." "You can't actually know for sure. You can *believe* your experience came from God […] but you can't *know* it" (21); therefore, "[d]on't." Woodward advises, "abuse the word *knowledge*" (21).

"[E]ach religion possesses its own mythological integrity […] rooted in mythological narratives" (35). Humans have inherited inclinations to expect there to be "something out there," and toward personal over impersonal explanations: "we might view *theology* as our attempt to place this aspect of the world […] into a knowledge framework that is more similar to the knowledge framework (epistemology) of science" (35). Woodward does not elaborate on ways in which each knowledge, and belief, community uses its own paradigms to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate claims.

The aim of this book is highly laudable, as are the scholars and insights it points to. Contemporary philosophy of science is, in fact, and for example, replete with insight useful for understanding religious, as well as scientific, thought—and for understanding their relationship. And these insights have not yet been widely available at the popular level. Nevertheless, this book suffers from serious weaknesses:

First, the ideas presented are not presented as clearly as they could have been. And the general conclusions offered are vague. The reader comes away with few clear takeaways.

The book also says some very surprising things in light of the very scholarship upon which it draws. It profitably applies Kuhn's analysis of scientific disciplines as governed by "paradigms" to religious communities as well. And it rightly observes that this involves scientific and religious communities in a kind of circular reasoning. But Kuhn and Popper would be very surprised to then read, "I exist within the world view of a neutral, dispassionate, and unbiased observer who evaluates the merits of knowledge and belief claims as an outsider. I don't profess to be a member of any one particular knowledge or belief system, but instead I remain *neutral*" (56). This fundamental attitude is urged (evangelized?) upon the reader.

There is no such observer, of course, at least not among us mere mortals. The work of the very scholars Woodward cites clearly acknowledge this. Kuhn was explicit that no scientist is such an observer. When individuals are observing, or drawing conclusions from observations, they can do no other than bring to bear the concepts, perspectives, beliefs, and biases they already possess.

The claim that "science is always questioning things—looking for other options, keeping itself open to change" (50) is also a very misleading thing to write from a Kuhnian perspective. According to Kuhn, the vast majority of scientists, the vast majority of the time, are convinced that they already know the basic truth in their subject area; they are just mopping up details. And anyone who challenges this basic truth is written off and excluded from the discipline.

Popper, also, would be surprised to read his work referenced in support of the claim that "Knowledge claims about an empirical world, such as the 'world' of biology, can be proven or disproven" (19). Popper notoriously maintained that science can prove none of what it posits.

The way Woodward conveys these thinkers' insights, then, amidst his own perspectives, can easily lead to serious misunderstanding. The book could have expressed these insights with greater care. A bit more simply-and-carefully-presented detail on the work of these thinkers would have helped, and would have rendered the book significantly more enlightening.

The book conveys other claims, as well, which are highly dubitable in light of contemporary scholarship. That religious knowledge is very fundamentally different from scientific knowledge is brought seriously into doubt by the epistemologies of Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, for example. The identifications of scientific knowledge with justified belief and religious knowledge with non-justified belief is even more dubious in light of such work. And when Woodward writes that "You can't actually know for sure" that religious experiences come from God (21) he is, as elsewhere, applying a standard to religious thought that science also cannot bear.

Epistemologists would be surprised to read knowledge being equated with mere "justified belief" (17), and read that "acknowledging this type of attitude [of corrigibility in science] is the very definition of *rationality* […] itself" (15). (This is a sort of hyperbolic language into which the book sometimes lapses.)

Woodward's analyses of "belief *in*," and "trust *in*," struck me as quite implausible. And many theologians would be surprised to read that the trans-empirical world of religion cannot be described or modelled—since that seems to be exactly what they do. Woodward's claim to "neutrality" is betrayed by quite a number highly substantive and dubitable claims.

The objective of this book is laudable, as are the sources and ideas it points to. However, it does not present these ideas with the clarity one would desire. And the wording used, and generalizations offered, can easily incline one toward serious misunderstanding. The book does not fully succeed, then, in carrying off its great promise.