RST 34.1 (2015) 129–130 Religious Studies and Theology (print) ISSN 0892-2922
doi:10.1558/rsth.v34i1.27152 Religious Studies and Theology (online) ISSN 1747-5414

Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-oriented Theology, by Adam S. Miller. Fordham University Press, 2013. 166pp. Pb., $18.00. ISBN-13: 9780823251513.

Reviewed by Joshua Culling, Concordia University of Alberta, j.e.culling@gmail.com

Keywords
metaphysics, ontology, Christian theology

Adam S. Miller's *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* is a fascinating and impressive foray into object-oriented ontology and theology. Miller undertakes an impressive task: to not only explicate this emerging ontology but also understand grace in light of such a project. Miller contributes a unique perspective. The interaction of object-oriented ontology and theology is in its infancy, which creates potential for unique content. Here, Miller does not disappoint. This work provides a fresh look at theology while also radically developing understandings of the operation of grace. Evaluating the success of such a project is difficult. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that object-oriented ontology itself is a relatively new theory. However, Miller has admirably provided both an introduction to object-oriented ontology (according to Bruno Latour), while also establishing a creative and challenging understanding of grace through the theory's application.

The book itself is divided into forty-one chapters. At first glance, the contrast of chapters to pages (only 166 including index) seems potentially absurd and disjointed. However, it soon becomes clear that Miller's strategy is a stroke of genius, which provides the audience with rich, bite-size morsels that both nourish and leave one in want of more. Clearly the author understood that the content he was dealing with was not only unique for much of his potential audience but also complex and best served through compact concepts. Miller effectively develops his argument by providing the reader with a series of small ideas that provide the context for his argument as a whole. If Miller had used an alternative method, the reader may have become lost in the details of object-oriented ontology itself and thus been unable to engage with Miller's original contribution, speculative grace.

So what is object-oriented ontology? According to Miller, an object-oriented approach gives "full metaphysical credit to the multitude of individual objects that compose our universe for the collective formation and continuation of their own existence" (1). As such, objects (in the broadest sense, both human and non-human) are understood to reveal themselves. They should not be subject to the reduction and categorization that characterizes traditional on-

tological conceptions. For Latour, all traditional metaphysical systems, be they Platonic forms, Kantian categories or the hand of God, are characterized by the assertion of an invisible, behind-the-scenes force that gives order and unity to the various objects that constitute reality. Accordingly, objects are subject to this ordering force, firmly defined by it and can be reduced to it. Latour is destabilizing this conception. Rather than reducing objects to conceptual categories that provide preconceived hierarchies and means to interpretation, he pluralizes the objects and asserts that each be granted its own "metaphysical dignity" (11). The result is that these plural objects are always interacting with one another. This interaction is a process that defines and constitutes the objects and ensures they are always in motion, always becoming.

Within this construct, God is present in the common plane, as an object amongst many objects. Accordingly, grace is no longer understood as the force of a transcendent, powerful, being, but rather is operationalized within the mechanics of reality itself. Grace is present in the interaction of the various objects through the constant give and take of each, and is alive in the availability and resistance in which each object resides. Grace is understood to be a tangible force that is testable and visible. Grace is the interaction of objects that leads to the ongoing shaping and becoming of the objects themselves. Thus, grace is presented according to relationship between objects. Each object influences and is influenced by the other. These objects are all on an equal footing with the result being that each needs to "translate, compromise, and negotiate" with other objects (47). Consequently, grace is not a force that is wielded by one object or another; it is received through the relationship of objects that are all in the process of becoming.

It is important to note that Latour does not address the notion of grace directly in his work. Although Miller draws heavily from Latour, this work on grace is an original contribution. As such, perhaps one who is well versed in Latour's work would accuse Miller of a misunderstanding or misapplication of the overall project, but it is impossible for me to level such a criticism. By my reading, Miller does an effective job of articulating a complex theory while also providing a plethora of theological implications. That being said, this work is necessarily limited in scope. Implicit within its content is the potential for a great deal more reflection. Miller's project is a fundamental reordering of Christian theology. His work on God, grace, truth, prayer and belief all provide interesting and challenging arguments that are ripe with potential for further development. The greatest success of Miller's work is how he provides an alternative lens through which to view Christianity and theology. In the coming years, there is more work to be done between theology and object-oriented ontology. Perhaps in hindsight this work will be looked upon as a landmark event in a new field of theological discourse.