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Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education (Book Review)

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Book Review

Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education, by Phillip E. Johnson (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995). 245 pages. \$25.01. Reviewed by James F. Mahaffy, Associate Professor of Biology.

This book is bound to have a powerful impact on the evangelical and especially college age student. The author gained earlier notice with his book *Darwin Retried*, in which he challenged some of the dogmatism of the neoDarwinian theory that is the accepted framework of most science in academia. Johnson writes lucidly and increases the punch of his story with real life examples from academia.

Johnson clearly sees the fundamental clash between evangelical Christian beliefs and the world and life view that undergirds a lot of the intellectual and science establishment. In his own words, "the Christian story is one of human beings who escape from superstition by mastering scientific knowledge and eventually realize that their ancestors created God rather than the other way around." Speaking in and from the perspective of a major university (he is a law professor at Berkeley), Johnson makes a strong case for rejecting this establishment naturalism and seeing Christianity as a legitimate alternative. Johnson sees the neoDarwinian theory of evolution as a cornerstone of this naturalism and a philosophy that will naturally exclude any real Christianity. Like Alvin Plantinga, Johnson is also, and I think rightly, critical of many evangelical scientists, who try too

hard to fit in with establishment science. He does not see their Christian theism making them any different in their science.

This book does a good job of exposing the world view climates of academia and its weaknesses, and presents Christianity as a reasonable alternative. While Johnson lacks the scholarly depth of Marsden's analysis of the university in the *Soul of the American University*, it is still on target and written in a style that is easily readable by the average college student.

Johnson's position still has some weaknesses. I would like to have seen him deal more with the influence of our postmodern culture. In this postmodern age, the university and especially its scientists have lost some of their former status as the rational and scientific gods with all the answers. I think Johnson's own life within a major university, may blind him a bit into attributing too much power to the influence of the university and its world view on culture. I also see him using too rationalistic an approach in the book. Even though he is good at criticizing some of the young earth folks for being too rational, it is almost as if reason has not been affected by the Fall.