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Science and the Quest for Meaning (Book Review)

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tioned, she claims that objects can "know" of each other's actions more quickly than light can pass from one to the other. Second, we may not conclude that our work is finished if we have learned only about the average behavior of particles—such as electrons—even though in quantum mechanical procedures we assume that we cannot know more than average behavior. Owens claims that we may not give up until we know *individual* behavior. These are interesting physical ideas held by a few physicists. But it hardly seems appropriate to imply that either the minority or the majority opinion among physicists is *the* position one must take in integrating our physical understanding with our faith. It is one thing for Christians to make conclusions about the entire scientific enterprise; it is another for the Christian community to insist that a certain paradigm is the correct one. The trees do clap their hands (the title is taken from Isaiah 55:12) in praise of the Lord, even if they do not communicate with each other by means of signals transmitted more rapidly than the speed of light.

There are a few obvious scientific errors ("light years later," "cesium molecule" (both on p. 56), and the statement that oxygen is heavier than ozone (p. 130)). These errors are not important in themselves, but they do raise the question of whether the author has correctly dealt with the conclusions of the most sophisticated science of our day. Also, she has almost uncritically accepted the ideas and writings of Albert Einstein and David Bohm, two physicists known to take a minority position. I did not feel that the opposing point of view was examined as extensively.

Nevertheless, Owens' conclusions could be correct. Readers who would like to examine a different view of twentieth century physics, expressed in a different way, with a Christian starting point, different from the humanistic starting point usually encountered, should read this book.

Science and the Quest for Meaning, by Donald M. MacKay. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982, 75 pp. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

This excellent book is based on the University of Waterloo (Ontario) 1979 Pascal Lectures on Christianity given by Professor MacKay of Keele University in England.

MacKay is a professing Christian and head of Keele University's Research Department of Communication and Neuroscience. The title of his first lecture is "Does Science Destroy Meaning?" His answer: "What I want to argue here is that, from a thoroughgoing Christian perspective, science and technology are in principle to be positively welcomed as an immense enrichment of the meaningfulness of human life, even if they do not of themselves answer the ultimate questions of meaning" (p. 4). He then refutes criticisms of the scientific approach, effectively showing, for example, that science is not rationalistic and that it does not lead to an acceptance of impersonal forces. Typical of the careful way he analyzes is his demonstration that "chance" is not such an impersonal force; that is, ". . . chance is not a name for an entity 'out there' that does things" (p. 15). As in his other writings, MacKay insists—still in defense of proper science—that it is poor science to mix levels of interpretation. Thus, it is wrong to maintain that the computer is "nothing but" electrical circuitry, or "nothing but" a series of programs. Condensing all the levels to one, he says, is reductionism. Properly understood, says MacKay, scientific activity is an expression of religious obedience.

"The Meaning of Science" is the title of the second lecture. MacKay will not relegate science to the moral sidelines: ". . . (S)cience in our modern sense finds its greatest encouragement in the biblical doctrine of the natural world as God's creation" (p. 39). But, says MacKay, God also upholds His creation every instant, and science properly carried out describes this upholding: it discovers "scientific laws." God causes all the events which we observe; we use those observations in the process of formulating those laws; and His upholding also means that He causes miracles, unexpected events, to occur (p. 47).

What, then, does science mean? "First and foremost, it means an increase in our accountability; an increase in opportunities for compassionate action and the exercise of responsible foresight for the benefit of our fellow men . . . . Secondly, I think science means unlimited growth of our wonder and awe at the mysterious universe in which we find ourselves" (p. 56). It also means we have ". . . confidence in the trustworthiness of the Creator who holds in being the natural world" (p. 57). But scientists and those who use scientific discoveries can be tempted because through those discoveries people obtain power: "In the last analysis, science and technology are worse than useless unless our society is *morally* realistic in selecting the ends to which these shall be applied" (p. 59).

An unusually interesting feature of the book is the question-and-answer discussions at the end of each lecture. MacKay handles difficult questions well, and in places his answers rise to the level of an effective Christian apologetic. This well-written book should be widely read.