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6-24-2008

June 24, 2008: Sacred Science

Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: Sacred Science

Date: 2008-06-24T14:20:00.003-04:00

6/24/2008--My son, Ben, sent me a short Opinion piece from July 2008 Scientific American magazine, entitled Sacred Science, can emergence break the spell of reductionism and put spirituality back into nature? The piece is by Michael Shermer, the self-described "libertarian skeptic writer and social scientist" who publishes the magazine, Skeptic. Shermer's reference to "Sacred Science" is a description of Stuart Kauffman's new book, Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason & Religion (Basic Books 2008). What Kauffman does is naturalize the deity. God, Kauffman writes, "is our chosen name for the ceaseless creativity in the natural universe, biosphere and human cultures." His point is to counter reductionism and describe instead a comprehensive theory of emergence and self-organization that cannot be accounted for within our understanding of the laws of physics: "Something wholly new emerges at these higher levels of complexity". This creative process of emergence "is so stunning, so overwhelming, so worthy of awe, gratitude and respect that it is God enough for many of us. God, a fully natural God, is the very creativity in the universe." Shermer calls this "God 2.0" and says it is "worthy of worship". But Shermer expects the Bronze Age God 1.0, Yahweh, to stick around anyway. Shermer's tone in this short piece is respectful and almost pious. It is quite a different tone from his usual wisecracking cheerfulness. Even more surprising is the announcement Shermer has put on the website for Skeptic concerning Kauffman's upcoming lecture based on his book: "[he] argues that people who do not believe in God have largely lost their sense of the sacred and the deep human legitimacy of our inherited spirituality... ." Is Shermer worried? Does he now join Austin Dacey in the beginnings of concern about the future of secular culture? About the needed sources of depth for human life? If so, Hallowed Secularism will have an audience.