[1966. Review of Issues in Science and Religion, by Ian G. Barbour. Christianity Today 28 Oct.]

Issues in Science and Religion. *By Ian G. Barbour* (Prentice-Hall, 1966, 470 pp., $7.95) is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, Butler University.

Ian G. Barbour, with a doctorate in physics from the University of Chicago and a B.D. from Yale, currently chairman of the Department of Religion and professor of physics at Carleton College, addresses himself to relating a specific philosophy of science to a specific type of religion.

Science and religion, he holds, cannot be separated into water-tight compartments because there is a single world of which they are both parts. One world requires an integrated, coherent worldview. God is the God of the physical world also, not merely of inner experience; therefore metaphysics cannot be avoided, although religion should not be tied to closely to the details of a metaphysical system.

Through chapters two to five Dr. Barbour surveys the development of European civilization from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. As might be expected from his academic preparation, he writes a very clear and competent account. Yet I would question his assigning the concept of mass to Galileo; and his liberal theology leads him to the blunder (honestly retracted by Emil Brunner in his later writings) that Luther and Calvin were "somewhat flexible in biblical interpretation. For the locus of authority was not the verbal text itself" (p. 29).

From the survey of science the author comes to the position of critical realism. The aim of science is understanding rather than prediction. He defends the use of models against Duhem and others, though he seems to undermine his argument by warning that models are not to be understood literally as visible, mechanical models. (Surely Lord Kelvin would have been puzzled by this qualification.) Against operationalism he argues that scientists discuss "evidence for and against the validity of a theory, not just for or against its use" (p. 166).

For those of us who incline toward operationalism these argument are unsatisfactory ("Atoms are as real as tables," p. 169); and the problem of the relation of religion to realistic science does not arise.

Neither does the author's precise problem arise for those who do not share his religion. Barbour seems to be a sort of sociological Schleiermacher. Quoting Whitehead with approval – "the dogmas of religion are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience of mankind" – he asserts that "theology … interprets the experience of the worshipping community" (p. 210). "It was through response to events in history, not to theological principles [italics mine], that the community came into being" (p. 215).

To the reviewer this appears as a false disjunction. People can react to historical events in divergent ways. Some people rejoice at an event, some bemoan it. Those who individually adopt a particular interpretation may then form a community. The theological (or other) principles come first; the community, those who have these principles in common, comes second.

Part Three discusses indeterminacy, life and mind, evolution and creation, and God and nature. The problems are important, and the author's discussion is keen, rather more difficult that the earlier section on physics. After all, biology is considerably more complicated than physics.

Two related limitations, however, remain: He is interested in only one view of science and one view of religion, and this produces certain liberal blind spots. Let the author believe, if he wishes, that "the doctrine of creation is not really about temporal beginnings" (p. 368); but surely he cannot properly represent this view as biblical. Similarly, how can a person who reads say "creation out of nothing is not a biblical concept.… At the opening of the Genesis story there is a primeval sea, a background of darkness and chaos" (p. 384)? The author must have been reading Hesiod by mistake.

Declaring that "foreordination is not compatible with the existence of open alternatives [to which proposition the reviewer agrees] …. Man is free to reject God's purposes…. Not all that happens is God's will [a proposition which the reviewer and the Bible reject] (p. 457), Barbour stresses God's immanence in natural processes, processes that are open and spontaneous because organismic. Nature is indeterminate; there are levels. "A metaphysics of levels [is] more consonant with 'critical realism'" (p. 455).

On the whole, from a religious point of view, it is hard to see any great difference between this critical realism and the Hegelian immanetism that Barth so vigorously exploded. And one suspects that the undefined terms "organismic" and "levels" hide rather than solve some very old philosophic difficulties.

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