



Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason

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This is a revised edition of John Milbank's masterpiece, which sketches the outline of a specifically theological socialtheory.

The *Times Higher Education Supplement* wrote of the firstedition that it was "a tour de force of systematic theology. It would be churlish not to acknowledge its provocation andbrilliance."

Featured in *The Church Times* "100 Best ChristianBooks"

Brings this classic work up-to-date by reviewing thedevelopment of modern social thought.

Features a substantial new introduction by Milbank, clarifyingthe theoretical basis for his work.

Challenges the notion that sociological critiques of theologyare 'scientific'.

Outlines a specifically theological social theory, and in doingso, engages with a wide range of thinkers from Plato toDeleuze.

Written by one of the world's most influentialcontemporary theologians and the author of numerous books.

Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason Details

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Author : John Milbank

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Joseph Sverker says

One surely should say something clever when reviewing this book because if anything it is erudite and very scholarly. The thing is that I struggled quite a bit with this book. I didn't feel like I quite understood the structure and the way Milbank went with his argumentation. Much felt like presentation of his interpretation on many social theorists and I think that was one reason why I had problems in getting in to this book. I have not read much social theory and I was not acquainted with the theories. The emphasis is very much on social theory and I'm not so sure he does that much of theology in the book. It come in the last 100 or 150 pages and there are some interesting ideas there, but they are a bit too loosely tied with what went on earlier in the book, at least to my mind. But that is probably because my mind is not expansive enough.

Andrew Boyle says

Woah.

Sara-Maria Sorentino says

gosh

'if we think seriously about time and creation, and follow in the tradition of Augustine, we shall conclude that knowledge is not a representation of things, but is a relation to events, and an action upon events. Our judgment of 'truth' of events, according to Augustine in the Confessions, is essentially an aesthetic matter. We recognize beauty or not, and the measure of truth is likeness to the form of the divine beauty of which our soul has some recollection. Augustine is basically right: truth, for Christianity is not correspondence but rather participation of the beautiful in the beauty of God. However, abandoning Platonic recollection, one should re-conceive the mind's kinship to beauty as the capacity of a particularly strong 'intensity' to become the fulcrum for events, and to shape events in an 'honest' and 'decorous' fashion.' 427

David Mosley says

A challenging work that reminds its readers theology should not be subsumed within or under the social sciences but is the science by which all others ought to be measured.

Ryan says

Milbank provides a new and refreshing argument with age old (but necessary) results. Christianity must cease taking its cue from the "secular science" and, rather, work within the Christian tradition itself for

means of addressing the world. This was the thrust of recent theological movements such as the "Yale school" like Lindbeck and Frei, and was further popularized by Hauerwas, with Barth's rejection of liberalism being the progenitor. (Of course, Christianity has long before Barth understood this). Milbank, however, not only argues positively for Christianity working on its own terms, but also critically demonstrates that the "secular" is actually defined and traces its origin to (heretical) theological claims. Thus the modern social sciences (politics, economics, sociology, dialectics, Marxism, nihilism, etc.) are rooted not in a separate secular sphere, but in heretical (pagan/gnostic) religion. Fantastic read, although there is significantly more critical than constructive theology involved. In fact, until the last chapter, one wonders where the Christianity is in the book. But this is a necessary emphasis for Milbank's argument

Addendum: Much that has been influenced by and continues the conversation of this book - going under the name Radical Orthodoxy - is fantastic theology. However, it sometimes becomes unnecessarily dense. If theology is to serve the church it must translate into not just the thought of the church but also the life of the church. And at times I feel that RO fails simply because of the over-technical density of the works. Its critiques are extremely important, but it would be better if they were communicated for the common people rather than require a degree in theology to understand. (I have a BA in Theology, much of this was incomprehensible to me)

Robert Heckner says

This book is intellectually demanding in both good and bad ways. On the good side, it is thought-provoking, tightly argued, well-round, and intellectually challenging. On the bad side, it is dense, at times overly scholarly, and heavy on what is essentially just name-dropping. Furthermore, the positive arguments of Milbank are until the last chapter (and even for a majority of that chapter) mostly to be gleamed from scattered insight or extremely deep reading of his manifold critiques. Personally, I would prefer a book in which Milbank lays out his arguments, clearly, concisely, and positively; as opposed to a tome that is at times obtuse, rarely concise, and composed almost entirely of critiques of previous thinkers.

However, these criticisms notwithstanding, Milbank has offered a rare work of scholarship that is provoking, tightly argued, abundantly researched, profoundly erudite, and insightful. Anyone interested in serious political theology, the relationship between social science and theology, or broad theological themes in modernity should read, if not all, at least some of this book.

Frkevin Gregory says

Probably one of the most important books I read in seminary. Too bad it was not reading in any of my classes.

It is a challenging book, well worth re-reading from time to time. It's true that you would benefit from some familiarity with the subjects he addresses. But that should not take away from the groundbreaking significance of this book. Milbank provides a foundation for theological pursuit that is both traditional and intelligent. It is an approach to theology that shows the depth of theological inquiry and its prowess as well.

I am looking forward to Milbank's further explorations on the topic, a two volume set. The first volume is already published.

Noelle says

Generally sort of mind-numbing. Perhaps it was over my head. Regardless, i didn't buy his argument.

Andrew says

Pretty amazing, I must say. I couldn't run down everything I liked and disliked, but the basic principle is right on. Theology is not and need not be a marginal and independent science. I think maybe Milbank went a little too far in exposing the sacred origins of the secular (or rather, I don't think most secular thinkers would care.)

I've since been undertaking more books from the R.O. camp and find them a very refreshing change for theology and helpful for my own attempts to reconcile my faith with my interest in "secular" philosophies.

Alp Eren Topal says

I have high expectations from this book. Yet the preface to second edition was kind of disappointing with regard to Milbank's language. I do not essentially dislike the postmodern style filled with "nietzschean this, dostoyevskian that, foucauldian those..." etc. yet Milbank uses these kind of shortcuts so much in the preface to be able to explain his position with regard to criticisms that half of the time I was lost as to what he is saying. After a point the intensity of the jargon oversaturates and hollows out the meaning.

Yet, merely the first 3-4 pages of the introduction were enough to clear away the bad taste; let's see how the rest of the book flows.

Larissa says

Impossibly hard to read prose with so many name-dropping instances to confuse even the pros. That being said, a significantly influential book with thought-provoking ideas.

Kessia Reyne says

I would much rather read someone else talking about John Milbank's ideas than to read John Milbank writing about John Milbank's ideas. Confusing to the point of being abstruse.

Still, cutting through the thick hedging of unexplained references and long strides of logic, he has some valid points to make about the construction of secularity, the ontologies of peace and violence, and the idolatries of our age.

Daniel Klawitter says

Freaking brilliant. Far smarter than any of the "new atheist" authors, this is heavy, heavy stuff, but serious as hell (or heaven). The Radical Orthodox movement begun by Milbank has produced some of the most penetrating philosophical/theological insights of the last two decades: authors who use the lingo of postmodernism to critique it (and often nation states as well) from a specifically liturgical/sacramental standpoint. Moving beyond the cliches of "conservative/liberal" to an indictment of modernity itself, this book is a recovery of Augustinian illumination and a vigorous defense of the best elements of the Xian project. A deeply learned critique of nihilism.

Jacob Aitken says

Milbank could have taken a course in how to be understood by the common man.

Thesis: Milbank convincingly argues that secular modernity is built upon presuppositions that are just as religious as those of Christianity. Even worse, they rest upon a more shaky foundation of faith.

Milbank argues that modern discussions of "secular" reason are historically off-center. There was a time when there was no secular. The saeculum used to refer to the time between the Advents. Now it refers to the area off-limits to Jesus. It now has spatial, rather than temporal significance.

Milbank notes that "secular" disciplines such as sociology have their own religious presuppositions which they then import upon the theological. In other words, all disciplines have their own "story to tell." All of these stories are built upon religious presuppositions. It is Milbank's contention that the Christian story is the best one.

Milbank then critiques communism, capitalism, and Durkheimian sociologies. This was a hard section to read and I really didn't understand it.

Milbank goes through a thorough interaction with postmodernism, noting that postmodern scholars see an "ontology of violence." Given the modern reality, such ontologies are inevitable. This is arguably the most important section of the book since it sets the stage for Milbank's later works.

He ends with an Augustian discussion of an "ontology of peace."

Problems with the book:

I can read 5 or 6 languages and have read hundreds of books of upper level theology and philosophy and most of the time I had no idea what Milbank was talking about.

JR Roach says

Fascinating, entralling, challenging, confounding - a wonderful journey whether you end up being convinced or not.
