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BOOK REVIEW

The full extent: An inquiry into nature and destiny

Richard Botelho, (Danville: Windstream Publishing Company, 2022), pp. 282, \$20.71, ISBN: 978-0-9643926-3-2

At the outset, I should say this is a book I wanted to like, primed by my existing metaphysical commitments. Botelho's recent contribution towards a post-materialist metaphysics can be placed within a growing body of literature that commandeers modern scientific discovery against the reductionist paradigm of scientific materialism (see pp. 48-68); it proffers a conscious *wholism* that is contrasted with the fragmentary and piece-meal style of the scientific approach (p. 46). This growing genre includes the likes of Rupert Sheldrake, Bernardo Kastrup, and Jeffrey Kripal, among others. In this work, following from the results of quantum theory and chiefly the Double-Slit Experiment – which shows the collapse of the wave function of electrons from their superposition upon observation and measurement – Botelho concludes that such discoveries imply the primacy of consciousness *vis-à-vis* the materialisation of matter, over-against scientific materialism, since the presence of mind actualises the really existing world (pp. 7-17). Quantum mechanics proposes for him a view of reality that is fundamentally idealistic and mind-dependent, implying an ultimate consciousness or mind that creates (pp. 14; 160-171, and *passim*). In doing so, he is intentionally arguing for a new integrative megatheory, and a larger paradigm shift that will open up new scientific and exploratory

potential (pp. 39-37; 229-240), one that overcomes the stagnation of the sciences in their current configurations.

Overall, quantum experimentation and theory suggest that information and intelligence operate in ways that transcend the limitations and rules of realism and the Newtonian world. Reality itself, in fact, should be conceived hierarchically, as consisting of several levels of interpenetrating aspects that are mutually implicated, cascading from the immateriality of mind to its physical manifestation. He invokes Platonism in this instance, and this appears to be his metaphysical preference throughout – against Aristotle who lies at the root of scientific realism (pp. 28-38). He puts forward several contemporary theories that attempt to bring together mind and the material, including variations of pan-psychism, pan-experientialism, and so on, leaving open several options while denying those that are predicated on physicalist assumptions (pp. 71-88). One implication Botelho draws from this is that, since quantum superposition and indeterminism is the ontological basis of the visible world, then manifest reality can be judged as unreal, a kind of simulation – or even as an illusion (pp. 50-51; 134-148). Similarly, quantum entanglement as well as quantum erasure and delayed choice experiments imply the deceptive nature of time and space (pp. 18-24), as well as the supremacy of nonlocality and a kind of monistic collapse of diachrony. This is further buttressed by his adoption of the Block Universe Theory which denies temporality, but also final indeterminism since everything, always already, has been decided – so to speak. This does not contradict freedom and spiritual indeterminism to his mind, since quantum experimentation suggests that multiple possibilities can coexist simultaneously, and so does not necessitate a hard-nosed fatalism (pp. 154-159).

As I said a moment ago, this is a book I wanted to like; any among the theologically orthodox holds to the primacy of spirit and consciousness. And yet, I found a paucity of rigour in Botelho's approach throughout. The metaphysical implications of the Double-Slit Experiment, for example, and the controversy of the psychophysical interaction between mind and matter are not patiently assessed in this book – or at least not to this reader's satisfaction. I was asking myself whether this jump from the act of *human* measurement to the ontological primacy of consciousness itself was not achieved rather too briskly, leaving many steps in-between unaccounted for. There are certainly suggestive avenues for exploration – of the non-duality of mind and matter – but these conclusions are not argued for in the desired detail. Nor are the deep criticisms of something like the Block Universe Theory engaged with or discussed. Again, metaphysical speculation and conclusions are reached rather too quickly, argumentatively speaking (here and elsewhere). Particularly controversial, no doubt, will be his apparent

rejection of evolutionary theory, and his repetition of “creationist” talking points (for example, gaps in the fossil record, etc.), which again is done over the expanse of a meagre three pages (pp. 91-94). His positive reference to *The Discovery Institute* is sure to raise a few eyebrows. This reader also found his techno-gnostic language of “exploitation”, that is of the spiritual and quantum potential for the advancement of human and technological possibility, a rather crude metaphorical apparatus, suggesting that “the secrets of foundational Mind” (p. 218) are necessary for the colonisation of the galaxy – in this instance, drawing immediate inspiration from his ufological conjectures (pp. 191-211). His reference to the manipulation of “the fabric of reality” itself (p. 218) also conjures up for me the old spectre of the *libido dominandi* – but maybe that is simply the Augustinian in me talking. Then again, even the Son of God renounced the “grasping” of divinity, so maybe I am merely looking for some kind of kenotic imagination in all this. Overall, this feels more like the metaphysics of Elon Musk than of Christianity – a tradition in which Botelho appears to have some stake (pp. 239-240).

Similarly, the tendency to characterise history as “illusory” or as a kind of divinely orchestrated simulation within a block universe, betokens a version of Platonism that is at odds with the historicising tendencies of Christianity – particularly in light of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. The denigration of the material *vis-à-vis* the spiritual is, of course, simply one of the recurring tensions that incarnational spirituality has sought to ameliorate. In this light, Botelho’s metaphysics has too much of a whiff of the old Gnosticism for my liking. There is a similar metaphysical non-sophistication for me in his terminology of God “dividing” up his mind in granting us consciousness (the old language of “participation” is better), and evokes a quasi-physicalist notion of the divine, in which God “manipulates physics according to his will” (p. 210), implying a kind of interventionist account of divine action – as if God were simply a kind of higher potency coming up against another thing called “physics”. A significant strand of Christian theology – particularly after Nicholas of Cusa – has seen such an account as implying a dualistic structuring of God and creation, as if we were dealing with comparative quantities operating *within* the immanent frame.

In sum, it is probably a truism to say that enormous creative potential is lost through the myopia of hyper-specialisation, as Botelho suggests. There are many fascinating intuitions and avenues contained herein which deserve fuller treatment and are a fruit of his theoretical juxtapositions. Botelho is certainly swimming upstream against the tide of scientific materialism; he probably gathers some comfort that he is not alone, and that there are communities of philosophers, scientists, and theologians who are seeking to undermine this paradigm. Every little bit helps I suppose, and yet I think that this particular

text is too philosophically and methodologically idiosyncratic to make much of a dent. The fact that this is basically a self-published text, produced by a publishing company (of which he is the president), without any blurbs by intellectual compatriots, suggests a certain level of speculative isolation that may be principled, the self-styled afflation of the prophet or poet. Or, maybe, there are other reasons.