Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology. Charley D. Hardwick. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 309 pages. Hardcover, $57.95. (Reviewed by Wesley J. Wildman, Boston University.)

John Updike ventured that, "When we try in good faith to believe in materialism, in the exclusive reality of the physical, we are asking our selves to step aside; we are disavowing the very realm where we exist and where all things precious are kept—the realm of emotion and conscience, of memory and intention and sensation" (*Self-Consciousness: Memoirs,* 1989). Few modern theologians would dispute Updike's proposition for the simple reason that a solely physicalist interpretation of reality has no more room for a traditional God than it does for the precious things of human selves. There is a small but growing cadre of theologians, however, for whom Updike's intuition misses the mark. Of these, none has argued against it more forcefully or effectively than Charley Hardwick in *Events of Grace.*

Hardwick rejects the inference that Updike and countless others make from an austere physicalism to the disavowal of emotion, conscience, memory, intention, and sensation. This drastic eliminativism is not demanded by a properly nonreductionist physicalism. In this Hardwick joins a swarm of contemporary philosophers for whom the maintenance of religious traditions is usually unimportant and the physicalist presuppositions of the natural sciences are compelling. Chapter 2 on "Physicalism and philosophical naturalism" lays out this case by means of an extensive review of John F. Post's *The Faces of Existence* (1987). Hardwick has no pretensions to originality here and indeed at no point does he take up a critical stance toward Post's view. Hardwick's aim is simply to get the philosophical option of nonreductionist physicalism on the table. It is what he does with nonreductionist physicalism in relation to theology that is so creative.

Most philosophers defending versions of physicalism today—it is as large group, as I have said—would be relieved not to complicate their case with any obligations to religious and theological traditions, with their intransigent fascination with transcendence and their frequent dallying with supernaturalism or other varieties of anti-physicalism. They would be, that is, if they bothered with such things at all, which few do. Hardwick is one of who does. Because of his dual concern, *Events of Grace* is important for both

philosophers defending physicalism and for theologians attending to the plausibility conditions of theology in the contemporary world.

On the one hand, Hardwick has something to say to his physicalist philosophical colleagues. His argument should arouse within them long-forgotten or suppressed memories of ancient religious wisdom about the world and theological insight into the human condition. Such irritating side-effects of Hardwick's book appropriately disrupt the steady growth of consensus around a version of physicalism that is more or less untroubled by much in the way of theological awareness. Hardwick does not make much of this consequence of his argument, presumably because he defers so thoroughly to Post in his philosophical view of nonreductionist physicalism and because he sees his audience as primarily theologically interested. But philosophers should pay attention to one of their number who argues potently for a cognitive theory of God that is compatible with an austere physicalism.

On the other hand, Hardwick has something to say to his theological colleagues. He rejects the conclusion that most of them are inclined to draw from a physicalist cosmology, namely, that in such a cosmology there can be no God worthy of the name and no possibility of retrieving the heart and soul of religious wisdom that lives on in Christianity, and perhaps in other religions, depending on the theological point of view. The best you can do, according to the common theologian's anti-physicalist intuition, is to recover bloodless theological language with no reference to the living reality of God, no capacity to express the potency of religious experience, and no connection to corporate religious practices from evangelism to ritualized worship. Hardwick demurs.

Chapter 1 on "Prospects for a naturalist theology" lays out the logic and structure of Hardwick's case. He assumes by way of motivation that a physicalist cosmology dominates the contemporary Western cultural imagination (I think Hardwick may overestimate the extent of physicalist convictions, but that is a detail). The pervasiveness of physicalism is due to the success of the natural sciences, which require no more than physicalist cosmological assumptions even if they can be rendered consistent with more elaborate cosmological visions. As Hardwick says, "Occam's razor is very sharp" (62). In view of this circumstance, Hardwick wants to determine whether theology—for him, especially Christian theology—can be reconstructed so as to be consistent with the most compelling version of austere

physicalism, which he takes to be Post's form of nonreductionist physicalism. He thinks it can be. The key is the adoption of some version of valuational theism in which value structures are objective and so can bear the weight of the cognitive intention of non-referential God-language. The version of valuational theism Hardwick prefers is that of Henry Nelson Wieman, with God conceived as creative event, though Hardwick modifies Wieman's conception in light of Post's physicalism.

The defense of the possibilities of nonreductionst physicalism, of valuational theism, and of their compatibility is the achievement of the first part of the book. But are these possibilities desirable or adequate to intellectual criteria with some sensitivity to theological concerns? The second part of the book takes three steps in the direction of justifying Hardwick's proposal "to interpret the Christian confession of faith as a seeing-as for which 'God' functions as a meta-assertion expressing a theistic set of values" (75). The first step is taken in chapter 3 with Hardwick's argument for the compatibility of philosophical naturalism and an existentialist interpretation of Christian faith after the fashion of Rudolf Bultmann. Faith, for Hardwick, is an existential self-understanding, a construal that bears directly on the everyday crises and joys of human life without becoming entangled in mythic or metaphysically supernaturalist cosmological pictures.

Chapter 4 takes a second step with the argument that Wieman's view of God as creative event is richly resonant with the previous chapter's existentialist interpretation of faith. God is not in the inventory of things that ultimately exist, according to physicalism, yet the creative events—events of grace, as Hardwick calls them—constitute the source of human good, which faith sees as God. This yields an existentially potent version of valuational theism capable of deflecting the charge that any view of God compatible with an austere physicalist cosmology must be irrelevant to the lives and struggles of religious people.

The third step, taken in chapter 5, faces with refreshing directness the problem of the reference of God-language when it is forced to be construed as a form of "seeing-as" by naturalism's demonstration of the flawed surface grammar of traditional theism. Hardwick carefully distinguishes his version of naturalistically religious "seeing-as" from both the categorial seeing-as of James Hall's *Knowledge, Belief, and Transcendence* (1975) and the non-cognitive seeing-as of Paul van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*

(1963). It is what the seeing-as is about that marks the difference. With Hall, the seeing-as "involves a 'taking-as' of ultimate ontological and cosmological scope[, which] Hall simply denies . . . can be rationally defended except by soft felicity conditions." With van Buren, the seeing-as is arbitrary, an unjustifiable "perspective on a form of life[; t]his is what gives it its non-cognitive character" (177). By contrast, Hardwick's seeing as is about "a form of life (the 'life of faith') constituted as a valuational matrix . . . rooted in events of grace."

All of this is against a two-fold objective, public background: an inventory of ultimate existents including only mathematical-physical realities (God does not have inventory status) is established through scientific investigation, and the objectivity of value (as well as other emergent properties) is first made possible by the nonreductionist character of any adequate version of physicalism and then secured by the necessity of positing objective value to account for the experience of value. The cognitive content of "God exists" is preserved, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of some other seeing-as approaches. But "God" has no reference and the cognitive content of "God exists" is determined "in a valuational and not an ontological context" (178-79).

While appreciative of Hardwick's rare openness with regard to the question of reference, I was unconvinced by his dogged yet thinly argued insistence that the cognitive content of God language can only be explicated valuationally. Hardwick's view is less complicated than one that preserves the possibility of symbolically mediated, ontological reference for God language, but something more complex than Hardwick's view is needed to account for the details of the highly structured phenomenon of cognitive breakdown in religious language. This has been a much discussed question since ancient times for the managing of which I find the ontological adventures of mystical traditions of philosophy and religion necessary. Moreover, in the final analysis I think it likely that the variation of valuational matrices among the forms of life in our world will prove no easier to manage and explain than the variation among ontological frameworks capable of establishing the cognitive content of theological assertions. That is to say, less is gained by eliminating ontological contexts from the determination of the cognitive content of God language than Hardwick seems to hope, and a strict existentialist method is not enough.

The three steps taken in the three chapters of part two lay the foundation for a naturalist Christian theology. To make a start on building on that foundation, Hardwick turns in the third part to explicitly theological themes. Hardwick avoids becoming entangled in the task of an entire systematic theology by rightly pointing out that his existentialist method forces the reopening of questions about the adequacy of traditional pre-sentations of theological material. He focuses his attention on just two key loci of Christian theology: Christology and eschatology. In chapter 6, on "The point of christology," Hardwick closely follows Schubert Ogden's Christol-ogical argument, from whose famous book the chapter title is borrowed, though with minor modifications deriving from Hardwick's physicalist version of naturalism. Chapter 7 is a discussion of questions surrounding the conservation of value and the purpose and meaningfulness of life and history that are registered in Christian eschatology. Hardwick again closely follows Ogden, both by borrowing the title of the chapter from another famous Ogden piece and by agreeing with Ogden about the importance of not saying too much about these matters. The achievement of this chapter for the wider argument is the removal of an important religious objection to naturalism, namely, that it entails "the absurdity of existence and the meaninglessness of life" (254).

Events of Grace makes for fascinating comparison with Gordon Kaufman's *In Face of Mystery* (1993), which Hardwick does not discuss. Both have Wieman's conception of God firmly in the background—explicitly in Hardwick and less so in Kaufman—so both see God in valuational terms as creative event and as the source of human good (Hardwick speaks of events of grace and Kaufman of serendipitous creativity). Both adopt a naturalist cosmology and modify Wieman accordingly. Both books are methodologically scrupulous and immaculately argued. But the differences are important, too. Hardwick is explicit about the non-reference of "God" and about the cognitive status of God-language in the context of a form of life that expresses a valuational matrix. Kaufman adopts a valuational posture for understanding God language but is more cautious on the reference question, as the title "In Face of Mystery" indicates. Where Hardwick follows an existentialist method, Kaufman's method is optimized for clarifying the warrants for theological assertions. Where Hardwick forges his argument from close readings of the work of others, Kaufman states his own point of view more independently.

And their sources differ, not least by virtue of Hardwick's immersion in recent naturalistic philosophy and in Anglo-American philosophy of religion and Kaufman's intimate knowledge of theological works.

Together, I would say that Hardwick and Kaufman are the vanguard of a Wieman renaissance in contemporary theology. It is the season for Wieman because his valuational theism is readily made compatible with a physicalist cosmology and because theologians are looking for alternatives to process theology due to widespread reservations about what Hardwick rightly calls the ad-hoc and speculative character of much of its metaphysical argumentation. There are other naturalistic alternatives besides Hardwick's nonreductionist physicalism and process metaphysics. Nancey Murphy blends nonreductionist physicalism at the worldly level with frank supernaturalism in regard to God. Robert Neville has built an entire naturalistic cosmology and ontology comparable in scope to those of Whitehead, Harthorne, and Weiss, but with a pragmatic and axiological accent, an emphatic affirmation of God as creator, and a sophisticated account of the reference of religious symbols. Of all the versions of naturalism vying for the attention of theologians, however, none is more effective in making the case for compatibility with theology than Hardwick's, none more explicit with regard to questions of reference in God language, and none more energetic in the existentialist rendering of theological motifs. These are the great virtues of *Events of Grace.*