

Ratzsch D. 2000. *Science and Its Limits. (Philosophy of Science, 2nd edition). Downer's Grove IL: InterVarsity Press. 191 pages. Paper, \$14.00.*

Reviewed by L. James Gibson

Del Ratzsch's book, *Philosophy of Science*, was out of print for several years. This is a revised edition, with a new title. It is especially welcome because it addresses an important topic from a Christian viewpoint, a perspective badly needed.

Books on philosophy can be dense and difficult to stay with, but not this one. One reason for this is that the book is rather short, and the chapters are not too long. Readability is enhanced by the writing style, which is informative and clear, and somewhat relaxed.

The ten chapters can be loosely grouped into three themes. The first four chapters describe what science is and how conceptions of science have changed, starting with Francis Bacon, and briefly passing through the theories of positivism, Popperian falsificationism, Kuhnian postempiricism, and the current view, which attempts to strike a balance between the contributions of the various historical philosophies. Objectivity, rationality, and empiricity are all accepted to a greater extent than in Kuhn's philosophy, but their limitations are recognized much more than in the old positivist regime.

Chapters 4 and 5 develop the current view of science by reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of science. Science is accepted as realist (theories actually refer to reality), rather than unrealist (theories are symbolic only), but limitations are recognized. Theories can neither be proved true or false, but can be considered to be approaching truth if they successfully explain natural phenomena and otherwise seem successful. Among the limitations of science are the power to provide ultimate explanations for the origins and purpose of nature. Ethics is another area where science is not the appropriate source of information. Reductionism may be applied to certain types of problems, but may not be appropriate in others.

The final four chapters deal with how science and religion interact. Disputes between science and religion are not over evidence but over the rules of interpretation. The intelligent design movement is analyzed in a new chapter added since the first edition. Design is a perfectly rational idea, but whether it works out as a scientific idea has yet to be determined. Christians have contributed much to science, but tend to

regard it as only one way of knowing, whereas many non-Christian scientists tend to regard science as the only real way of obtaining knowledge. Science and Christianity are different pursuits, but they are not in isolation from each other. Their fields of interest partially overlap. Christian and non-Christian science may be quite similar in content, but are likely to be quite different in the significance attached to them by members of the different groups. The book ends with an appeal to Christians to discuss their differences in a spirit of Christian love.

I enjoyed reading the book, and recommend it as a source of the major issues in developing a Christian philosophy of science. It should be useful as one of the textbooks used in courses on science and religion.