
For theologians, the value of this book consists in emergent meanings that overlap the different horizons of theology and of the natural sciences. These meanings have aroused a great deal of fascination among a million readers of Watson's writings. The overlap may be due to the fluctuating usages of the term "supernatural" in a context originally appropriated by theology but now also by the natural sciences.

The title "Beyond Supernature" is etymologically redundant and suspiciously flavored with sales appeal. But for the scholarly differentiated consciousness, the subtitle is more helpful: "A New Natural History of the Supernatural" is an excellent outline of Watson's intentions and facilitates this reviewer's attempt to integrate these with Lonergan's heuristic structure.¹

SUPERNATURAL

Watson uses the term "supernatural" when discussing concepts like altered awareness, biorhythms, clairvoyance, demonic possession, extra-sensory perception, fitness for survival, genetic

mutation, hypnotic states, inspiration, Jungian collectivity, kin-recognition, life-fields, miracles, natural selection, out-of-body phenomena, psychokinesis, quantum leaps, radiesthesia, shamanism, telepathy, unconscious phenomena, vitalism, witchcraft, xenoglossy, yoga, Zen meditation, and similar phenomena that have been attracting his many readers. (He prescinds from theological contexts of grace above nature, or of faith above reason.)

Generally, “supernatural” is here thought to be synonymous with “paranormal.” What then differentiates the normal from the paranormal? Apparently, Watson’s norm is frequency of occurrence: paranormal events are rare and elusive, and reports about them are mostly anecdotal.

HISTORY

Would Watson be satisfied with “history” that is merely a list of anecdotes? No. In fact, he expresses frustration with this anecdotal feature of his book: history requires systematic reflection, but anecdotes by themselves lack systematization.

Watson is systematic enough in identifying the sources of most of his anecdotes: there are 424 identifiable sources in his bibliography and all these can be assessed and verified (or falsified) by future investigators. Besides these, there are a few other anecdotes that are more subtle and apparently autobiographical: these arise from reflections into his own personal experiences, both external and internal. Even though these are fewer, readers would find them more fascinating and a stronger motivation for wanting to verify them in an analogous context.

In particular, readers gifted with mystical discernment will find them very enriching both for themselves as individuals and for the mystical Organism they choose to serve. Discernment can provide the hypothesis that Watson may be seeking (although this is doubtful) in his desire to systematize the historical process being traced by his list of fascinating anecdotes. But Watson may efforts (in science and in common sense), it works them into coherence by reversing their counter positions, and it knits them into a unity by discerning in them the concrete prolongations of the integral heuristic structure which it itself is” (418).
not be prepared to consider any hypothesis that goes beyond what he considers natural history.

NATURAL HISTORY

By this, Watson probably means history as traditionally understood in the natural sciences: history of physics, history of chemistry and history of biology. He also includes histories of human sciences like psychology, sociology and anthropology (but not mystical theology). Occasionally he speaks of “socio-biology” in his detailed examinations of activities in ant colonies, beehives, termitaries and colonial amoebae. In these instances, a large collection of individuals or cells tends to organize itself into an “organism” in a way that he finds mystifying. But he diplomatically avoids explicit extrapolation of such mystifying processes into mystical science, lest he be discredited by his fellow biologists.

Rightly, he presupposes that history is a flow, a process, a forward movement.² He notices the forward movement from biology to socio-biology and its analogy with the movement of human beings towards a planetary organism called Gaia, the name of the Greek earth-goddess. Is scientific innovation intended?

NEW NATURAL HISTORY

The innovative intent is suggested by the word “new” in the subtitle. Watson’s natural history is new in two ways: first, he includes data not yet considered significant enough in earlier natural histories; and second, he focuses on the historical process of convergence (and transcendence) among the sciences. These innovative features mutually interact. The sciences are converging precisely because more and more meanings from the different sciences are becoming more significant when seen as fusing into and merging with each other, e.g. in socio-biology. And the more they fuse and merge, the greater the quantity and evocative power of emergent meanings: they evoke hints of transcendence.

Such processes are properly historical, for the basic aim of history is systematic intelligibility of what is moving forward. The emergence of socio-biology is a forward movement. To Watson, this suggests that the term "organism" now be broadened to mean a "process in continual flux" (p. 127). This flux sometimes includes a "stable personality" (p. 45) and a "drive to transcend" (p. 113). Stability and transcendence increase fitness for survival. Darwin's hypothesis about survival of the fittest is here seen to suggest that Gaia will survive. Gaia will become increasingly greater than the summation of its parts. Even this summation will become an operand of the "multiplier effect" (p. 124) that Watson infers from entomology and which he envisions as relevant to the evolution of Gaia. It is called paranormal. Can it also be called miraculous in the sense of being "above nature" and implying "divine intervention"? Watson says this is "patently unsatisfactory" and prefers to speak of miracles as "homegrown and ... part of human biology and behaviour" (p. 187): superstitition is unsatisfactory.

PARANORMAL FOLKLORE

Watson admits that his language is "folklore of the paranormal" (p. 45). Etymologically, "folklore" means tradition of a particular culture. In this sense, biologists and their kinsfolk in the life sciences that systematize this folk tradition are using their own home-grown language. Its terms and relations are derived from a set of basic terms and relations that all correspond to empirical contents of their specialized intentionality.

But the folkloric notion of the "empirical" is not critically examined and so includes only experiential data from the outer senses. It implicitly excludes experiential data from inner consciousness, due allegedly to difficulties in standardizing interior parameters, but more probably to feelings of "physics envy" (p. 228). And yet, to reduce life to mechanisms of physics and


chemistry is branded by Lamarckian biologists as "ignorant or superstitious" (p. 11). Watson is thus faced with a choice between mechanicist reductionism and a critical language that overcomes folkloric ambiguity. He vigorously rejects reductionism. But he is humbly resigned to his "lack of spiritual maturity" (p. 267) and to his folkloric ambiguity.

FOLKLORE AND THEORY

Folklore belongs to the world of common sense where things are known in relation to our senses or to our needs and desires. This differs from the world of theory where things are known in the relations constituted by their interactions with one another. Are there such relations between Watson's socio-biological data and the "mass hysteria . . . at Pentecost" (p. 134) whence Christian history arose? Group bias inhibits Watson from asking such a question. But when bias is overcome by spiritual maturity, he will enter more freely and more fully into the world of theory that ensures "the gradual construction of a quite different mode of apprehension and of expression" and so broaden his coined term "sama" or collective awareness (p. 134) to include the transcendent state of "being-in-love."

RECOMMENDATION FOR POPULAR PIETY

Folkloric ambiguity enters not only into paranormal phenomena but into all aspects of indigenous religiosity or popular piety. Popular piety, according to Pope Paul VI, is "so richly fruitful and, yet, so vulnerable." This vulnerability calls for a critical re-interpretation of folkloric data according to the method proposed by Lonergan.

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. 33.
8. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. 