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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Toby Betenson recently completed his PhD at the university of Birmingham. He is a visiting lecturer at Newman University, assistant editor for the European Journal for Philosophy of Religion, and has just been awarded a John Templeton research fellowship to work on the project 'Theism: An Axiological Investigation' at Ryerson University.

John Bryant is Professor Emeritus of Biosciences, University of Exeter; former Chair of Christians in Science; past-President of the Society for Experimental Biology.

Gavin Hyman is Senior Lecturer at Lancaster University. His publications include *Traversing the Middle: Ethics, Politics, Religion* (Cascade, 2013), *A Short History of Atheism* (I. B. Tauris, 2010) and the co-edited *Confronting Secularism in Europe and India* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

Andrew Robinson is a GP in Newton Abbot and Honorary University Fellow in Theology at the University of Exeter. He is author of *Traces of the Trinity: Signs, Sacraments and Sharing God's Life*.

Bethany Sollereder is a research coordinator at the University of Oxford. She has a PhD in Theology from the University of Exeter and a masters in interdisciplinary theology from Regent College, Vancouver. Her research is on evolutionary theodicy.

Christopher Southgate is a Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of Exeter and Principal of the South-West Ministry Training Course. He is the author of *The Groaning of Creation: God Evolution and the Problem of Evil*.

Roger Trigg is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick, and Senior Research Fellow, Ian Ramsey Centre, University of Oxford. His most recent book is *Religious Diversity: Philosophical and Political Dimensions* (Cambridge University Press 2014). Templeton Press are to publish his new book on science and metaphysics at the end of 2015.

EDITORIAL

I must begin by expressing, on behalf of the Science and Religion Forum, profound sadness at the news of Jeffrey Robinson's untimely death. Mike Fuller has kindly offered some words to follow this editorial and they very much communicate the shock that the Forum's committee members feel. Many of you in the Forum knew him well and I know that he will be dearly missed.

In the 2015 Annual Boyle Lecture, which I had the pleasure of responding to earlier this year, Russell Re Manning breathed new life into natural theology by outlining a vision of it as a way of seeing the world and the 'whispers of divinity' therein. Natural theology, he proposed, should be recognised as a human attitude and he drew our attention to the fact that it should not see itself as an enterprise distinct from other forms of theology or one that is divorced from science, history and other forms of knowing. His lecture affirmed too the inescapable ethical nature of what we might call (to hijack a term from Michèle Le Doeuff) our theological imaginary: the images, metaphors and symbols that imbue our discourse.

Re Manning's lecture calls us to a timely reconsideration of the nature of natural theology and its role in bringing together science and theology in fruitful reflection. What he proposed chimes rather harmoniously with much of what John Bryant picks up in his article review of Tom McLeish's *Faith and Wisdom in Science*. McLeish asks us to revisit the term 'natural philosophy'

with its emphasis on the search for wisdom and love of the world as an alternative to ‘science’ with its focus on knowledge. Bryant highlights the ethical nature of science in which questions of authority and responsibility are central.

Before that, we are treated to Andrew Robinson’s review of the book that made a difference to him: John Robinson’s *Honest to God*. Andrew reminds us how important the book was in trying to grapple with the currents of secularisation of the 1960s and he helps us to see how the death of God movement should be recognised as not just radical but also profoundly orthodox.

We have a broad range of other reviews on offer this time. Bethany Sollereder engages with Oord’s *Creatio ex nihilo* and asks us to consider various theologies of creation, while Roger Trigg reviews the collection of Boyle lectures edited recently by Re Manning and Michael Byrne exploring, among other things, questions about how science and theology should refer to metaphysical entities that are beyond empirical testing. Christopher Southgate offers an incisive analysis of Ryan McLaughlin’s *Preservation and Protest*. As Southgate points out, McLaughlin, like Moltmann, sees death as a form of universal evil, which has substantial ethical implications. The question of whether death can actually be said to be bad at all is then picked up in Toby Betenson’s review of Ben Bradley’s *Well-Being and Death*.

There are two reviews that I chosen to reprint for this edition: Gavin Hyman’s discussion of Mitchell Stephens’

new book on atheism and Christopher Southgate's review of Johnson' *Ask the Beasts*. I hope this variety affords something for everyone. And, of course, please do check the list of available books for review - and do suggest one if you would like to write something for the next edition.

From Mike Fuller, SRF Chairman

SRF members will have shared my shock and sadness at the sudden and unexpected death of our hard-working Secretary and Treasurer, Jeffrey Robinson.

It was a pleasure to work with Jeffrey over the time that I have been Chairman of the Forum. He was always very diligent in his service to all our activities, and I greatly valued the time he and I were able to spend together, both at conferences and here in Edinburgh. His regular visits - partly in order to see old friends from his days here and in St Andrews, and partly to pursue his love of Scottish dancing - were always occasions I enjoyed.

A full obituary will follow in a later edition of the Reviews. In the mean time, our thoughts and prayers are with Jane, and the rest of Jeffrey's family.

A BOOK THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God*. London: SCM Press, 1963. (50th Anniversary Edition, SCM Press, 2013, pp. 130, £12.99 Pbk, ISBN 978-0334047339).

REVIEWED BY ANDREW (JOHN) ROBINSON

My copy of *Honest to God* sits diminutively on my shelves, easily overlooked among the theological heavyweights. It's the first edition, the March 1963 paperback, its now delicate pages foxed and browned, light and fragile to hold, like the unexpected lightness of a bird's skeleton.

In spite of our shared names I am unrelated to the author, the then Bishop of Woolwich. Yet I feel an almost biological affinity with the book. It was passed down to me through the maternal line, like a little piece of mitochondrial DNA. I cannot now establish whether it was first bought and read by my mother or by her mother, but I am told it made a difference to them both, as it did to many thousands of others as it made its surprising rise to controversial fame. I wonder whether, even then, it may have made a difference to me, albeit a subconscious one, to the extent that it perhaps influenced my early emotional and intellectual environment. Later, when I read it myself for the first time, it failed to make any difference at all. More recently still, I have read it again – more than once – and found my original affinity with it re-kindled. It is a book that (probably) made a

difference to me, then didn't make a difference, and is now making a difference again.

I was born in January 1964, so, like the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, born at the stroke of India's independence, *Honest to God* and I have somewhat parallel life-stories (you do the math ...). Some parents play Mozart to their babies *in utero*. Who knows, perhaps my mother was reading radical theology while my parts were being knitted together. In any case, one way or another I inherited from my parents a largely unspoken sense of the unsolved mystery of the relation between ultimate transcendence and the ordinary world of work and play.

That mystery has been with me for as long as I can remember, but it didn't crystalize into formal theological questioning until *Honest to God* and I were about 30 years old. It was around then, I think, that I read the book for the first time, and I didn't really make much of it. I was certainly onboard with Robinson's anti-supernaturalist theism. The issue of naturalism, the apparent sufficiency of natural explanations, had been pressing on me through a growing interest in Darwinism and neo-Darwinism. But I was also much exercised at that time by the theological implications of the radical contingency of the evolutionary process, learned from the Stephen Jay Gould's books and essays, and I suspect I found Robinson's approach far too anthropocentric. Around the same time I read Charles Hartshorne's *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (1967) and annotated it extensively (my copy of *Honest to God* has pencil markings of my

grandmother's, but none of my own). Process theology seemed more promising and perhaps more exciting than variations on orthodox Christianity, though it only took a couple of years for me to conclude that Whitehead's legacy did not have the answers I needed, at which point I began to head off down other paths.

Honest to God celebrated its 40th birthday without me, though it turns out that I did manage a nod to the anniversary by tucking inside the cover a full-page spread of commemorative reviews and comment torn from the Church Times. These resurfaced when, as we both hit 50, the little book and I became reacquainted. At a conference in Copenhagen on 'Deep Incarnation', at which I gave a paper on the concepts of Incarnation and participation in God's life, I had got talking late into the night with a theologian who was working on the 'death of God' movement of the 1960s. My own theology had, over the previous 20 years, gradually become both more orthodox (in terms of the Trinity, Incarnation, etc) and more confidently non-supernaturalist. I suddenly saw that the death of God movement was both more orthodox and more radical than most commentators seem to suppose, and that my own thinking had some strong and unexpected resonances with it. I soon found myself immersed, *inter alia*, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich, Harvey Cox and Thomas Altizer. And, of course, Robinson.

This time around I was better placed to understand what Robinson was getting at. I could now see that the anthropocentrism of 1960s theology was an inevitable

consequence of the situation the theology of the time was trying to address, namely the collapse of liberal theology in the wake of the horrors of the First World War and the Holocaust. The neo-orthodoxy that succeeded liberal theology had attempted to repair the damage but had failed to provide points of engagement with the post-war world. The death of God movement understood that these failures constituted a major crisis for Christian theology, even if its proposals were themselves inevitably products of their time. If the death of God theologians had known what we know now they would, I'm sure, have had a more ecologically orientated set of concerns.

Nowadays the death of God movement gets short shrift from most theologians. While I was passing through a chubby toddler phase, its proponents were held worthy of gracing the cover of Time magazine. Yet by the time I started school in the autumn of 1968 the movement was fizzling out. To most contemporary thinkers it now appears as a short-lived fad, a peculiar and eccentric manifestation of Christian thought that flourished in the unique intellectual milieu of the 1960s. I have become convinced, to the contrary, that such easy dismissal of the movement reflects a current state of denial on the part of the church and the theological academy of the depth of the challenge (and the opportunity) presented by taking secularity seriously. Re-reading *Honest to God*, together with the other core texts of the death of God movement (such as Cox's *The Secular City* and Altizer's *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*), it seems to me that the movement may have represented an

'evolutionary bottleneck' in Christian thought. Unfortunately theologians have managed to find various ways of bypassing the bottleneck. If Christian theology had had the courage to purify itself by pressing through this narrow path then it would now see more clearly that affirming the transcendence of God does not require buying into the forms of supernaturalism that the world rightly rejects.

One of the ironies of the book is that it is not actually clear how honest Robinson was being! He presented his thoughts as tentative and exploratory, and claimed to be torn between the orthodoxy in which he had been nurtured and the radical theologies he was now encountering. But arguably the key message of the book, and indeed of the whole death of God movement, is that orthodoxy is itself unpalatably radical. A later book of Robinson's was titled *The New Reformation*. Robinson believed that at the heart of this 'new reformation' would be Jesus' claim that whoever has seen him has seen the Father (John 9.14). We are to take seriously Jesus' extraordinary response to Philip's request to be shown the Father. The answer Philip receives is, in effect, that it is no good trying to peer over Jesus' shoulder to catch a glimpse of the Father pulling the strings in the background. The only way of 'seeing' the Father is to follow the way of Jesus.

For all their diversity and internal contradictions, the death of God theologians were suggesting, more than anything else, that the Incarnation is the key to a coherent

Christian theology for our time. It's an idea that should have made a difference. Perhaps it still could.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Tom McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 304, £18.99 Hbk, ISBN 978-0-19-870261-0.

REVIEWED BY JOHN BRYANT

This is an extended version of a review which appeared in *Third Way* (October 2014). The original sections are used here with the kind permission of the editor.

'*Faith and Wisdom in Science*' – the title itself is intriguing and perhaps challenging, so what is this book about? I will get into its contents through three illustrations. The first concerns a former colleague, a Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter. Despite his almost totally Arts-based qualifications and experience, he was very interested in science and that led him to work with his students on the use of drama in presenting ideas drawn from modern science – and especially medical science. Indeed, I collaborated with him in a Wellcome-funded project to produce a play, '*A Present for Anna*' (on the theme of embryo selection for a 'saviour sibling'). I wondered why my colleague had not, earlier in life, gone down the science route. He said that as teenager he was totally fascinated by the workings of the natural world, even to the extent of performing little

outdoor experiments. However at school, science was taught in a sterile, rigid way, repeating tedious experiments for which the results were already known. There was no beauty or imagination in this approach.

My second illustration also concerns an interaction with a non-scientist. I was interviewed recently by a student studying English at the University of Exeter. The interview was part of his research for a dissertation on Representations of Science in Literature. Our early discussions were of a fairly general nature but then came the 'killer question': 'Is the dystopian view of science that is adopted by many serious authors a response to the bombastic hubris of scientists?' – not 'some scientists' but 'scientists'. We were all in the dock, accused of an overblown, self-important arrogance.

It was a question that Tom McLeish, the author of *Faith & Wisdom in Science*, would have loved (I know this because I relayed it to him!). And thus we return to the book and especially at this point, to the 'parable' presented in the Introduction and to the 'Clamour of Voices' described in Chapter 1. Science is often portrayed as an activity that gives us firm, clear knowledge about the natural world but it is also a knowledge that is shrouded in mystique because much of what we know is hard for many non-scientists to understand. The most accessible topics are presented on TV and radio by media-friendly scientists who themselves become media stars. Overall, however, much of science remains inaccessible to a wider public. And yes, one does meet some scientists who exhibit a kind of intellectual

arrogance; it is easy to see how the portrayal of scientists in a ‘priestly’ role as ‘guardians’ of knowledge arises. It is then but a short step to suspicion or even fear about what scientists are doing.

The idea that only science provides us with ‘evidence-based’ knowledge has certainly led to a type of philosophical arrogance. The methods of science are seen as the only valid ways of investigating the natural world. This view is known as ‘scientism’; it is an ‘idolised view of science’ (p. 8). Scientism has a loud voice in the science-religion debate where religious claims about the universe are seen as lacking any evidence and therefore ‘false.’ However, McLeish asks us to put aside what he calls the distorted geometry of much of that debate. He invites us to go back to the original name for the discipline we now call Science, namely Natural Philosophy. Whereas ‘science’ effectively means ‘knowledge’, ‘natural philosophy’ can be unpacked as ‘love of wisdom about the natural world’. He asks whether that makes a difference to our understanding of what science is. It’s a question that I also ask my students in my Philosophy and History of Science module but inevitably, their answers are somewhat briefer than the wide-ranging and convincing discussion presented to us in *Faith & Wisdom*.

This takes me to my third illustration, this time of a more general nature. When asked about the origins of science, you might name Francis Bacon (1561-1626) as the ‘Father of Modern Science’ and perhaps also mention Copernicus (1473-1543). Or you might suggest that

Science originated in Greece at the time of Aristotle.¹ So what happened between the practice of Hellenic science and the late 15th century? It has been widely stated that the Christian church suppressed science in that period but that falsehood has been blown away by the work of authors such as James Hannam² and Allan Chapman.³ It is also blown away by the many examples that McLeish discusses in this book. In Chapter 2, for example, we are specifically asked to think about science as a love of wisdom about natural things (see above). Starting with unexpected results and an accidental discovery in physical biochemistry in the late 20th century, we are taken back eventually to the early 4th century. I especially love the way that the author discusses the deliberations of Bishop Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) on light, matter and the cosmos and the debates between Gregory of Nyssa (one of the 4th century ‘Cappadocian Fathers’) and his sister Macrina on the nature of mind. Throughout these many centuries, there have been serious and meticulous observers of the natural world, many of whom occupied a place of authority within the Christian church (but not forgetting the Islamic scholars of the 9th to 13th centuries who are discussed in Chapter 8). Any division between natural philosophy and theology would

¹ No less an authority than Sheldon in *Big Bang Theory* agrees with this view of the origin of science!

² *God's Philosophers* (London: Icon Books, 2010)

³ *Slaying the Dragons* (Oxford: Lion, 2013)

have seemed nonsensical: the two were intertwined and supported each other.

Chapter 3 then takes us through creation narratives, accounts and references in the Old Testament, from the wisdom literature via the psalms and prophets and then back to the ‘formal tradition’ of Genesis 1 and 2. We can surely agree with McLeish that the strong focus only on the Genesis accounts of creation distorts our understanding of the place of creation literature, which runs as a clear thread through the OT. Further, it is clear that the OT writers, well before the supposed birth of science in Aristotle’s Greece, were keen observers of the natural world; the book of Job, to which I will return later, is a prime example of this. I will add that it was not just the OT writers who exhibited a keen observation of the natural world. In ancient Egypt, the tax collectors were aware that the likely yield of crops in a given year was related to the amount of silt deposited by the Nile in flood and thus were able to calculate the amount of tax to be taken. Returning to the OT, engagement with creation, with its joy, its pain, its mystery is seen as integral to a relationship with God. As the Jesuit scholar, Henri de Lubac put it ‘The first language God uses to communicate with me is Creation. It is for me to listen and to answer – but the initiative is not mine’.

Chapter 4, discussing Order and Chaos, is one of the book’s more ‘sciency’ chapters. It deals firstly with events that are apparently random, namely the appearance of comets, but which we now know conform to a pattern. It then moves on to consider chaotic events which embody

the ordered behaviour of the physical universe and yet whose outcome is unpredictable. The two main examples are earthquakes and weather systems but chaotic behaviour is also discussed in some detail in relation to piles of sand. Even with a detailed knowledge of the properties of matter, there are many situations in which we cannot predict an outcome. McLeish states (p. 101) that the 'creative tension between the chaotic and the ordered lies within the foundation of science today but it is a narrative theme of human culture that is as old as any.'

I now return to Job. Chapter 5 of *Faith and Wisdom* entitled 'At the Summit: the Book of Job' is clearly the pivotal chapter in the book. Like many scientist-Christians I love the last few chapters of Job. I can see in the questions that God asks of Job that the writer was a keen observer of the natural world. And the reactions induced in the writer are not diminished now that we know how most of these phenomena work. What Keats called 'unweaving the rainbow', does not remove our awe and wonder, nor answer the fundamental questions about purpose.⁴ But McLeish's analysis is far deeper than that. He goes through Job in some detail, outlining six different attitudes to the Creation and to its embedded pain and suffering. His discussion sent me back to a section of the book with which I am less familiar, namely Chapter 28. There is a beautiful description of mining in

⁴ See my guest post on the Science and Belief blog <http://scienceandbelief.org/2014/08/28/magic-and-metamorphosis/#more-2424>; also *Faith & Wisdom* p.15

OT times – the care, the diligence, the hard work, the courage needed to obtain precious metals and jewels from paths untrodden by ‘proud beasts’ nor seen by the ‘falcon’s eye’. But by contrast, where can we find Wisdom? It is an important question; one that we continue to wrestle with. Towards the end of this long chapter, McLeish sets out his conclusion about the dialogue between God and Job (p. 146). ‘Now we have seen that the question of God’s justice in his management of creation as a whole is woven into Job’s disputation, we recognise that it is not bypassing the question for the Lord’s answer to take this thread and expand it into the glorious quest into nature’s workings with which the book [nearly] finishes. With trepidation and against the weight of opinion, I am therefore suggesting that the ‘Lord’s answer’ *is* an answer to Job’s complaint – possibly the only adequate answer.’ You may disagree with this but do read his five lines of argument that are marshalled in support of this conclusion.

Chapter 6 is a brief discussion of Creation and Reconciliation: the New Testament Creation Narratives. Then follow the two ‘What are we going to do about it?’ chapters. In Chapter 7, ‘A Theology of Science, the author argues that ‘... we need to know why we are doing science ... where science belongs in the stories ... of our history, hopes and values and ultimately of our purpose. Those are theological stories’. It is therefore of no surprise that in Chapter 8, Mending Our Ways, he rejects any model for the science-religion debate that does not recognise that natural philosophy and theology are not

just complementary but intertwined and that we need to act on that. ‘Can we learn what ‘loving wisdom of nature’ might [actually] mean? A partial answer to this question is given in the Epilogue – a re-working of the story of Jesus and the Roman centurion (Luke Chapter 7) – where the author recognises that the ability to do science does endow us with authority and responsibility.

I love the overall approach to science, faith and wisdom that McLeish presents in this book. It is a ‘grand view.’ Further, I welcome the fact that this approach is beginning to be more widely appreciated.⁵ Many of us find beauty in our science and this can be one of the starting points for a less stereotypical discussion with the disciples of ‘scientism’. Imagination also has an important role. Ruth Bancewicz suggests that ‘the most inspiring scientists, like the best theologians or artists, are amphibians, moving between material reality and the deep resonance of our visionary minds.’⁶ In doing so, she is drawing on a metaphor developed by the philosopher-theologian Douglas Hedley.⁷

I need to say that there are some typographical errors and minor errors of fact but since they have been listed

⁵ Some words from the American neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky *I love science, and it pains me to think that so many are terrified of it, or feel that choosing science means you cannot also choose compassion, or the arts, or be awed by nature. Science is not meant to cure us of mystery, but to reinvent and reinvigorate it.*

⁶ Bancewicz R (2014) Diving between worlds. *Third Way* 38, 15-19

⁷ *Living Forms of the Imagination* (London: T & T Clark, 2008)

elsewhere,⁸ I will not point them out here. In any case, they do not detract in any way from the message(s) of the book. Indeed, overall, I am in some awe of the depth and breadth of scholarship and wisdom that Tom McLeish exhibits in *Faith & Wisdom*. The range of reading undertaken in order to write it must have been immense. I started reading the book during a rough Channel crossing but I would advise setting aside the time to give it the attention it deserves, getting immersed in its scholarly writing style. And having read it, keep handy for dipping into. You will not be disappointed.

⁸ Holder R (2014) Review of *faith and Wisdom in Science* in *The Tablet*, September 04, 2014

REVIEWS

Thomas Jay Oord, *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and its new rivals*. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 111, £24.99, ISBN 978-0415712156.

REVIEWED BY BETHANY SOLLEREDER

Theologies of Creation is an exploration of the viability of the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing. In this short edited volume, ten authors from a variety of theological perspectives offer insightful essays on just what is at stake in the debate over this ancient question, and how contemporary theological inquiries—from feminism, to the natural sciences, to biblical studies—bring new challenges to the doctrine.

Three of the authors defend the traditional notion of *creatio ex nihilo*: Philip Clayton, Richard Rice, and Eric M. Vail. They maintain that the traditional doctrine holds strengths that are not retained by the other approaches, and that in some cases—such as emphasising the divine love that creates—*ex nihilo* serves the theological intentions of those challenging the doctrine more effectively than the new proposals. Vail, in particular, argues that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* should not be abandoned, but simply remodelled. Challenging the traditional position, Mary-Jane Rubenstein argues that seeking the “true story” is missing the point, and instead we should further investigate the values contained in our creation myths (religious or scientific) to see what purpose they serve and why. Rubenstein’s feminist

approach is joined and added to by Catherine Keller's proposal of creation out of chaos. Marit Trelstad engages closely with contemporary physics (particularly Lawrence Krauss) and argues for a process theology model of *creatio ex potentia*: "nothing" itself has creative potential. Stephen Webb investigates the New Testament's language of creation being made in, though, and by Christ, arguing that creation can be construed primarily as *ex Christi*. G. Michael Zbaraschuk explores the notion of creation made out of God's own nature. Michael Lodahl and Thomas Oord close the book with the proposal that God creates out of love.

Six of the essays originally emerged out of the 2011 American Academy of Religion meeting. This helps explain why some of themes, such as the second century history of *creatio ex nihilo*, are re-examined several times with almost exactly the same information. At times this is frustrating, as the essays are each so short that it seems a waste that the small space is being used to repeat the same story and the same points. Still, each repetition has slightly different nuance, which can highlight consensus and shades of difference amongst the authors.

The articles in this book almost represent an "in house" discussion amongst relational theologians. The great majority of the authors identify as either open or process theists. The collection of essays would have been strengthened, in my opinion, by at least one—but possibly more—classical theists who defend the viability of the *ex nihilo* doctrine responding directly to the relational theists. Stephen Webb, the only classical theist

represented, is not amongst those who defend *creatio ex nihilo*.

While the book does not provide any consensus in terms of whether the doctrine should be finally abandoned, maintained, or simply remodeled, it does reveal some of the red herrings of the debate. One of these is the “biblical status” of *creatio ex nihilo*. The opponents of the doctrine point out repeatedly that this is not a doctrine which appears in the Bible. This might seem like a point against the ex nihilists, except that every one of them happily and openly acknowledges that *creatio ex nihilo* is not an explicit biblical doctrine as well. It is one question that this book does definitively place in the category of irrelevant.

Perhaps the least attractive element of the discussion is that the reader will have to prepare him or herself for a proliferation of Latin *ex*-phrases. Not only is *creatio* described as the expected *ex nihilo*, but also as *ex potentia*, *ex profundis*, *ex amore*, *ex Christi*, *ex deo*, and finally as *ex creatione a natura amoris*.

The scope of this book is ambitiously broad. The authors do not limit themselves strictly to biblical studies or theology, but roam freely into philosophy, history, ethics, and the natural sciences. This broad approach is helpful, as it introduces—but rarely solves—the implications the theology of creation can have for a huge spectrum of issues. The reader is left with much to ponder and to work out for him or herself. For anyone interested in the doctrine of creation, but who does not have the time to explore the longer works of these

authors, this book would serve as an excellent introduction to not only the issues at stake over *creatio ex nihilo*, but also to the perspectives of each of these authors on a wide variety of theological topics.

Russell Re Manning and Michael Byrne (ed.) *Science and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. London: SCM Press, £35.00, ISBN 978-0-334-04595-3.

REVIEWED BY ROGER TRIGG

Many of the founders of the Royal Society in 1660, and therefore of modern science itself, were not only religious believers, but were strongly motivated in their scientific researches by their faith. A prominent example was the great scientist, Robert Boyle, who in the words of his descendant's Preface in this volume, had 'a deep Christian devotion' and a 'clear sense that science could undoubtedly serve to deepen the Christian faith.' It was in this spirit that Boyle endowed a series of lectures that ran without a break for some forty years at the end of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth. The idea of such a series was revived in 2004, and this volume contains ten new Boyle lectures, delivered in London over the following ten years. The list of lecturers is a roll-call of some of the most eminent figures who have contributed to the burgeoning field of science and religion over the last few decades. The result is an intriguing snapshot of the state of the discipline in the first years of the twenty-first century. The lecturers

themselves come from various sciences including, in particular, physics and biology. There is a sprinkling of theologians, including the venerable German, Jurgen Moltmann. Many of the most perplexing problems raised for theology by modern science are expertly discussed.

It is no criticism of such a distinguished company of contributors over the years to observe that by now the majority have long since retired. We are given here the fruit of many years of contributions to the subject. It is, however, inevitable that there is a feeling of looking back at where we have come from, rather than facing the new challenges that are continually arising. Modern science itself develops at an alarming rate, and theology has continually to face new ideas, and new fashions, in science. There are intimations in some of the contributions of what is now being discussed, as opposed to what was being faced ten, twenty or even thirty years ago. One example is the reference to the multiverse by John Polkinghorne in an absorbing lecture. This is one instance of how concepts are raised in contemporary physics, not least as a result of string theory, which seem far from any possibility of conceivable scientific tests. Polkinghorne says trenchantly that the existence of a multiverse is as metaphysical as the assumption of the existence of a divine Creator. He does not pursue the point, but there are contemporary physicists, such as Max Tegmark, who explicitly hold that, since all mathematical possibilities are actual, every conceivable universe must then exist. This is one example of the way in which theories are advanced in science about what is in

principle inaccessible to humans. Even so, they masquerade as established science, and are very often intended to block recourse to theological explanations. The answer to why we live in a universe congenial to life (as, of course, we have to) seems to be that all logical possibilities exist. Such a move blocks any explanation, even a scientific one, but the underlying idea is that there is no need for an appeal to theistic purpose. As Polkinghorne suggests, the metaphysics of many inaccessible universes does not seem less extravagant than appeal to one Creator. He briefly remarks that an infinite array does not necessarily include every possibility. That would not satisfy scientists such as Tegmark.

Russell Re Manning is joint editor of this collection, and contributes a fascinating Introduction about ‘Science and Religion in the Twenty-First Century’. He notes how the field has developed, particularly over the last fifty years, and credits Ian Barbour with being one of the founders of science-and-religion as a distinctive form of enquiry. The field brings scientists and theologians into dialogue with each other, and this volume illustrates how that can happen. The reflections of Simon Conway Morris, for example, on the constraints on evolution, and what he terms ‘evolutionary convergence’, are particularly illuminating. Russell Re Manning also points out the contribution of history to the field. The excellent lecture by John Hedley Brooke on Boyle’s legacy is a good example of this. Yet, as is also pointed out, philosophy has a role to play. Indeed, it might appear

that science and theology have to meet on neutral philosophical ground. Concepts such as materialism, and scientism, are quintessentially philosophical. A superb lecture by Keith Ward exposes many philosophical presuppositions among scientists particularly concerning ‘matter’ and ‘materialism’. In a nod to the idea of the multiverse, Ward points out that what he terms ‘scientific materialism’ ‘postulates a supremely elegant and intelligible mathematically structured realm from which many space times may and probably do arise.’ He adds that this can only be knowable by the intellect, not the senses. His conclusion is that ‘materialism is much more akin to supernaturalist theism than it is to common sense empiricism’. It holds a view of scientific method as ‘an appearance of a mathematically describable reality – a supernatural reality.’

Russell Re Manning is part of a younger generation working in the field of science and religion, and natural theology. He draws attention in his informative Introduction to the current philosophical dissatisfaction with scientific orthodoxy. He mentions how the idea of emergent entities and properties has become a major issue. The lecture in this volume by Philip Clayton illustrates this. The problem, though, with emergence is the difficulty whether new properties can be sufficiently distinct from what they have emerged out of, to be able to have a separate causal influence on it. Yet if they are separate, we may be led to reintroduce the very dualism that emergence was supposed to avoid. The perennial issue of mental and physical properties illustrates this. If

we are sufficiently embodied, how can the mind be separate enough to influence the body? In his lecture, John Polkinghorne refers to human beings as 'psychosomatic unities'. Yet this risks blurring the distinction between bottom-up causation by physical factors alone, and top-down influence from mental factors. If the mind is not properly distinct, how can it have a significant causal influence? How far emergence is different from the more materialist idea of supervenience, beloved of some philosophers, is an intriguing question.

Another philosophical issue raised in the Introduction is what is termed 'the rejection of the regnant understanding of the laws of nature as universal and exceptionless regularities'. The idea of laws, that cannot be broken, and were originally seen as ordained by God, seems more in tune with the mechanistic philosophy of the seventeenth century than with the unpredictability and randomness introduced by modern physics. The idea of a law, perhaps expressed in mathematical form and sharing the necessity of mathematics, still holds sway in the minds of many scientists. Yet it could be argued that laws are never without exceptions, and, more crucially, may not apply at all times and all places. John Wheeler, the famous Princeton physicist who invented the term 'black hole', pointed out that our physical laws may not hold in the interior of black holes. As we have already indicated, physicists are happy, too, to conceive of radically different universes with utterly different laws. In other words, we may face a world of contingent order and regularity, not one governed by necessity. Laws may

be summaries of what generally happens in this universe. They can be expressed in mathematical terms, but that raises the question why mathematics, apparently the creation of the human mind, can mirror physical regularities so beautifully. Polkinghorne gives one answer when he refers to cosmic order as a 'reflection of the Mind of the Creator'. Similarly humans can, he says, understand divine creation, because we are made in the image of God.

One major new field, that of the cognitive science of religion, is missing from this collection. Malcolm Jeeves, in his lecture on psychology and religion, does not explicitly deal with it, partly no doubt because it is so new. Russell Re Manning briefly mentions it, together with reference to the groundbreaking work of Justin Barrett. This is definitely an area of present and future interest in the interaction between science and religion. Some are delighted to use it to 'explain away' religious belief. On the other hand, new research in anthropology and psychology has done much to show the ubiquity of religion and its deep roots in human nature. Whatever its claims to truth, religious belief is clearly bound in a deep way with what it is to be human.

This is a book containing many riches. Which parts one picks on for further thought and discussion may well depend on one's particular interests. It is suitable for a wide audience, and for that reason its high price as a paperback is regrettable. It can certainly provide a springboard for much further work in the flourishing field of science and religion.

Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, *Preservation and Protest: Theological Foundations for an Eco-eschatological Ethics*. Minneapolis: Mn.: Fortress Press, 2014, pp. Xiii + 460, £32.99 Pbk, ISBN 978-1451480405.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER SOUTHGATE

This volume, one of Fortress Press's 'emerging scholars' series, is an absolute gift to the teacher of ecotheology.

Ryan McLaughlin, who is based at Duquesne University in Pennsylvania, has produced a careful and thoughtful taxonomy of ecotheological approaches, deriving from his doctoral thesis at Duquesne. He expresses himself well aware, in the Introduction, of the limitations of such approaches, and the risk of oversimplifying the positions of his fellow scholars. Nevertheless the approach can be of great value for instructors in the field, providing very helpful frameworks by which students can enter complex debates.

Furthermore McLaughlin asks all the right questions. To construct his taxonomy he asks: which ecotheologies stress the conservation of the creation as it is, privileging the doctrine of creation over considerations of redemption, and which focus directly or indirectly on human beings, as opposed to the wider goods of the creation. He recognizes moreover that good ethics can only be done out of good theology, and asks what sort of ethics flow from each of these types of approach. He also

realises (and all these things might seem obvious but are often neglected) that ecological ethics can be done at the level of systems, or at the level of individual animals, and may look rather different depending on which approach is adopted.

The framework of the book is thus extremely helpful. Inevitably, putting scholars' positions into these boxes tend to oversimplify them. In particular, the assignment of Orthodox theologians to 'cosmocentric anthropocentrism' does not quite ring true. And it is not clear to me that Thomas Berry represents the only type of 'cosmocentric conservationism' needing exploration. But the taxonomy is skilfully set up to lead up to 'cosmocentric transfigurationism', and to a very interesting study of Jurgen Moltmann and Andrew Linzey. McLaughlin prefers this approach, in which the emphasis is on all living things, and on a theological ethics that looks towards the eschaton, rather than on a focus on human beings, and on the conservation of the present order of nature. The underlying thesis of this treatment is that Moltmann's highly developed Trinitarian theology of creation, but underdeveloped ethics, is helpfully complemented by Linzey's eschatological ethics of concern for the individual animal.

McLaughlin also sees the importance of tackling the issue of evolutionary theodicy, in order to construct an ecotheology that can lead to helpful ethics. Here he takes a very interesting line. Recognising the difficulty of positing any sort of fall-event, caused by either humans or angels, he nevertheless wants to distance God from the

disvalues involved in the evolutionary process. (In doing so he follows the sort of line taken by David Clough in his *On Animals*, which is an important source for the present book.) Very imaginatively, McLaughlin suggests that before there was anything that science could understand, God created possibilities and set them loose. (Ruth Page's study *God and the Web of Creation* could have helped him here.) What resulted was a set of physical laws that gave rise to the mechanisms of evolution. These then were not God's will, though they were made possible by God's gracious creative act. The consequence was that creatures developed in isolation (and competition) rather than communion. The work of Christ makes possible the participation in God that was not possible in this first creation. As I have discussed elsewhere, this sort of proposal for distancing God from the disvalues of the creation suffers from both problems both theological and scientific.

The theological problems that attend this proposal are different from those attending most fall-based theodicies. These tend to set up powers in competition with God in ways that dilute God's sovereignty, while leaving the question as to how these powers distorted God's purposes. McLaughlin's free and playful God seems to escape these difficulties. But it is an unfamiliar view of God, since the Christian tradition has always wanted to affirm God's giving of the laws governing creation. Moreover, theologians in dialogue with contemporary scientific cosmology, which tends to stress the randomness of the arising of this present universe, tend

to want to insist on God as the creator of the laws governing the randomness.

The other big difficulty with such a view as McLaughlin's is that what science suggests is that the reason we have such ingenious and beautiful creatures – the cougar and the deer, the peacock and the beaver, and indeed the chimpanzee and the human – is precisely because the long processes of evolution made them possible. God's (presumed) purposes were therefore realized through those processes. McLaughlin's very imaginative suggestion still seems to leave the question – could not God have realized those purposes in some other way? Like Page's view, it does not, ultimately, draw the sting of the problem of evolutionary theodicy, because it still leaves God responsible for creaturely existence, and for an existence in which the purpose-bearing processes still come with massive disvalues attached. (It is odd, incidentally, that the related proposal of Neil Messer receives no discussion, although Messer's line is the inspiration for Clough's.) Where there might be a point of contact with my own views is when at the end of this long book McLaughlin summarises his view by saying 'God has willed creation's consecratory distance for the sake of communion, not isolation' (409). For whatever reason (we might both say), communion is not possible in the first creation, but God willed a creation that could be redeemed, and entered into communion with all flesh in a way that enabled the isolation of creaturely selves to be overcome.

McLaughlin then elaborates his conviction that all living creatures will know a resurrection life, not merely as compensation for suffering, but as part of the inclusion of all in communion with the divine life. This is a good and useful section, in which he is properly critical of Lisa Sideris' rejection of an eschatological drive to ecotheology and ethics. When McLaughlin turns at last to his own ethical proposal, it is both logical and radical. He advocates a form of proportionalism, in which needs can only be identified in relation to teloi, and competing teloi must be evaluated against the overall principle that the good is always 'the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering' (394). He then adds a virtue-ethical component – the quality of the implementation of an action to serve a need does also matter.

McLaughlin follows Moltmann in seeing death as a sort of universal evil. If the good had been expressed in terms of flourishing, rather than the preservation of life, a different ethic would have resulted. But this preoccupation with the avoidance of death, even in non-sentient creatures, leads McLaughlin entirely logically to commend to cosmocentric transfigurationists a fruitarian way of life. A whole set of relationships between humans and animals is lost in this type of ethic, which is also dubiously practical for a population of over six billion.

There are assumptions in the animal theology and ethics developed by Linzey, and more recently by Clough, and again here, that continue to bother me. First, that caring for animals means supposing that God did not create the processes that tend to cause them to suffer

in the wild. I would say rather that we must accept this uncomfortable conclusion about God, and that facing up to their suffering is part of caring for animals as they actually are. That process of facing-up does not imply that animals in human-controlled situations should have suffering imposed on them by their human stewards. Second, there seems to be an implicit assumption that Genesis 1 must necessarily be the determinative narrative by which the Bible is brought into conversation with science. As W.P. Brown has helpfully reminded us, the Hebrew Bible contains at least seven major accounts of God's creative work, of which Gen. 1 is only one. Psalm 104, and Job 38-41, are fully accepting of the reality of predation as part of God's economy, and there is no reason to relegate these passages in pursuit of a plant-eating biosphere for which no scientific evidence obtains. Even Gen. 1 is usually tempered by reference to the tilling of the ground in Gen. 2, and insulated from contradiction by reference to Gen. 3. McLaughlin is alert to the difficulties of fall-accounts, but does not escape the charge of a Genesis 1-dominated hermeneutic. In fairness, he acknowledges that further hermeneutical work is one of the directions in which his research programme needs to be taken.

Perhaps inevitably there are some neglected sources. Holmes Rolston, rather strangely referred to as a 'secular ethicist', deserved a much more extensive treatment. Ernst Conradie is a significant scholar who has continually pointed to the balance between creation and redemption in the construction of ecotheologies, yet he is

not cited once. My own observations on stewardship, and on narrative genre in ecotheology, would have thrown interesting light on McLaughlin's taxonomy. It is baffling too to see the omission of Jay McDaniel from the discussion of the redemption of all creatures, and of Niels Gregersen from a discussion of incarnational identification with all flesh.

At a more general level there are flaws in the production of the book, which detract from its excellent qualities. The index contains significant omissions, and there were more typographical errors than one likes to see. 'Clough is more general to Barth than Linzey' (260n. 5), 'complimentary' for 'complementary' (269), and a crucial missing 'not' on 287, are the sort of thing that should certainly have been picked up. Moreover, the overall formatting smacks too much of a thesis reproduced from a disk. Fortress owe their 'emerging scholars' a better set of production values than this. But this should not detract from my overall conclusion that teachers and graduate students in the field will benefit enormously from working through this material. Dr McLaughlin is much to be thanked for making it available.

Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 198, £20.99 Pbk, ISBN 9780199557967.

REVIEWED BY TOBY BETENSON

Well-Being and Death, by Ben Bradley, is a book that tries to answer the question: 'How bad is death for the person who dies?' Bradley addresses the old Epicurean argument that death is not bad for the one who dies: 'So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more' (p. 73).

The aims of the book are set out in the introduction. Bradley swiftly answers the main question of the value of death with a 'deprivation' and 'difference-making' account of death's disvalue: In short, death is bad for the person who dies only because it deprives that person of any future goods that they would have experienced had they not died. Each chapter of the book goes some way to defending a constituent part of the theory.

Chapter 1 outlines the theory of 'well-being' that would be necessary to make any judgement of well-being levels at particular times (and in alternative, counterfactual possible worlds). The theory of well-being that the author settles upon is 'pure hedonism'; the view that pleasures are the only intrinsic goods, and pains the only intrinsic evils. He appeals to intuition to support

this view, and adopts the offensive (rather than defensive) strategy of attempting to undermine the viability of any alternative theory of well-being. Given the intuitive support for hedonism, and the lack of a viable alternative, hedonism wins out as the true theory of well-being by virtue of being the last theory standing.

Chapter 2 sets out the 'Difference Making Principle': 'The value of event E, for person S, at world w , relative to similarity relation R = the intrinsic value of w for S, minus the intrinsic value for S of the most R-similar world to w where E does not occur' (p. 50). It's this 'DMP' that enables Bradley to say that death is bad for the one who dies, since the deprivation of losing a good life is the 'difference' that makes the event of death bad. A great deal of the book is dedicated to defending DMP against criticisms, counterarguments, and alternative theories, and the author is very successful in this regard. I found myself fairly convinced of the DMP by the end, even though, in my opinion, the defence of it was overly reliant upon intuitions.

Chapter 3 defends the thesis of 'subsequentism' (death harms you after you die) against the alternatives of 'priorism' (death harms you when you are alive), 'concurrentism' (death harms you when you die), and 'eternalism' (death harms you before, during, and after you die). It's the combination of pure hedonism, the DMP, and subsequentism that 'constitute a simple, plausible, and attractive account of death's badness' (p. 111).

Chapters 4 and 5 do not add to the thesis, but consider the other issues of whether the psychological continuity of the individual should be taken into account in the calculation of death's value (it shouldn't), and whether we can defeat the badness of death by living well (we can't).

The principal point of criticism that I would put to Bradley is that his book fundamentally misreads the conclusion of Epicurus's argument; or at least, if Bradley does not misread Epicurus's argument, he only defeats a 'straw man' version of it. Bradley claims to have defeated the Epicurean argument, but it's clear to me that his thesis regarding the objective badness of death is perfectly compatible with a successful Epicurean argument that addresses the subjective worry-worthiness of death. This point emerges in Chapter two. In discussing whether DMP entails that we should worry about death, we get this:

I am interested here in the value of death, not so much in how people should feel about it. I have presented a view in which death is bad for its victim. According to this view, not finding Aladdin's lamp is bad for someone too. And I think this result is correct. To be sure, there would be something odd about a person who got very upset about the fact that he has not yet found Aladdin's lamp. But this merely shows that there are things that are bad for us that we should not worry about very much. [...] My death ... merits bad feelings. And it seems to me that my death is unlike Aladdin's lamp, in that it is rational to feel bad about my future death but not about my failure to

find Aladdin's lamp. However, it is very hard to say where the difference lies. [...] Perhaps there is no important difference between dying and not finding Aladdin's lamp. If that is so, and if we should not feel bad about not finding Aladdin's lamp, then Epicurus was right: we should not feel bad about death at all. Fearing death is irrational. But death is still bad for us, and it is still generally rational to take steps to avoid it when such steps are available (just as it would be rational to take steps to find Aladdin's lamp, if only it existed!), and this is more important than what attitude we should have towards it. (pp. 61-2)

This passage serves to clarify the author's intentions for the book. The question that the book addresses is: 'Is death bad for the person who dies?' The answer: Objectively, yes. But how you should feel about that fact is a completely separate question, one that the author is not interested in. And yet, as far as I can see, the Epicurean argument was never meant to say much at all about the objective badness of death, but addressed, rather, the subjective issue of how one should feel about death. The conclusion of Epicurus's argument is not 'Therefore, death is not bad' - or if it is, it is only with the caveat that the only way something can be bad is if someone is around to feel bad about it - but rather, 'Therefore, death is not to be worried about'. It is this statement that is found in the *tetrapharmakos*, the 'four-part cure' of Epicurean philosophy. So we cannot consider Bradley's argument to defeat the Epicurean argument. The two are perfectly compatible, as far as I

can see. 'Is death bad for me?' Yes, according to Bradley. 'Should I worry about death?' No, according to Epicurus, because whenever the harm (as Bradley sees it) happens to you, you won't be there to know about it. If Bradley wishes to separate these questions, then he must concede to separate answers, and he only addresses one.

The book is very clear, informative, and the discussion has sufficient depth whilst remaining accessible. It is a good book, and I agree with its conclusion insofar as I now believe death is objectively bad for the person who dies, at those times in which they would have been enjoying goods had they not died. I just don't think this 'objective badness' matters all that much, given that, according to Epicurus, that person won't be around to know about it.

REVIEWS REPRODUCED FROM ELSEWHERE

Mitchell Stephens, *Imagine There's No Heaven: How Atheism Helped Create the Modern World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 336, £18.99 Hbk, ISBN 9781137002600.

REVIEWED BY GAVIN HYMAN

This review first appeared in *Times Higher Education*, March 2014. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author and editor.

Mitchell Stephens is a powerful and persuasive American evangelist; an evangelist for atheism, it is true,

but no less an evangelist for that. He is an eloquent preacher of the way of salvation as he sees it, and his oft-repeated message is that atheism has historically created a virtuous circle of enlightenment. Atheism has brought deliverance from tyranny, intolerance, ignorance and bigotry, and many of the values we most treasure today – free enquiry, human dignity, equality and democracy – would scarcely have been conceivable without the invaluable contributions of atheistic thinkers, writers and activists stretching back through centuries of Western history. Stephens delves deeply into this history and constructs a narrative that shows the central importance of atheistic thought for human cultural achievement.

But although he is partisan, Stephens is by no means unfairly prejudiced. He avoids the caricature and ill-informed dismissals that have sometimes marred the work of other atheistic preachers. He concedes that religion too has sometimes been a force for human good, but he wants to give atheism a fair hearing and contends that its contribution to human flourishing has too often been ignored, downplayed or forgotten. The book's later chapters guide us down well-trodden paths (Charles Bradlaugh, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre), but particularly fascinating are the earlier chapters in which Stephens unearths the contributions of lesser-known radicals and rebels from centuries long before the Enlightenment and the “age of atheism” – in the ancient world and in medieval and early modern Christendom. He has read deeply and widely and preaches his lively and readable message to persuasive effect.

This is, of course, a Whiggish narrative, a story of improvement and progress, and a transition from darkness to light. As Stephens puts it, “if religion supports oppression and injustice, a critique of religion is necessary to make way for democracy, equality, human rights.” It is thus clear that, for Stephens, this enlightenment is not only intellectual and scientific, but also political. He sees the transition from theism to atheism as presaging a shift from concern with a post-mortem hell to the “real hell” of people’s lives of poverty and deprivation. The coming of atheism has cleared the space for a proper political concern for social justice.

But there is another narrative of the relationship between the decline of religion and social justice. This is a story that tells of the coming of nihilism and the prevalence of relativism, of the end of ideology and thus of socialism, and the concomitant triumph of the free market. As the market becomes sovereign, the political space shrinks, whether expressed in terms of citizens’ apathy or impotence. As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, this has led many secular philosophers and theorists back to religion. Perhaps unexpectedly, they perceive Christianity to harbour potentially revolutionary resources in these “politically patchy times.” This is a very different narrative from that told by Stephens, but is perhaps not incompatible with it.

If the secular Enlightenment was indeed, as Stephens argues, necessary to rescue us from religion’s historical entanglement with slavery, racism and other associated oppressions, perhaps a return to religion (as even some

atheists, including Slavoj Žižek, argue) is now necessary to rescue us from secularism's incipient relativism and its resulting political impotence and cultural poverty. To argue thus would not necessarily entail the rejection of Stephens' skilfully constructed history, but it would entail it being placed within a wider dialectical backdrop. So while there may be much truth in what Stephens says, it is perhaps not the whole truth

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. Xviii + 323, Hbk. £18.99, ISBN 978-1-4729-0373-0.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER SOUTHGATE

First published in *Science and Christian Belief*, Vol. 27:1. Reproduced with kind permission from the author and editor.

This title is drawn from Job 12, and the underlying argument of the book is that understanding of the natural world, in particular as Darwin taught us to see it, is a source of wisdom - indeed an essential source for the ecological crisis. The author is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York, and has written many well-known books, including most recently *Quest for the Living God*. She is a member of the Sisters of St Joseph. This book is lucidly and articulately written and conveys complex concepts in very accessible ways.

Elizabeth Johnson wants to see a subtle change in theological method, resulting from attending closely to

the natural sciences, a change she believes will be as important as the contributions of liberation and feminist theologies. She begins her consideration of the relation of science to theology from Ian Barbour's familiar fourfold taxonomy of types of relationship. Very helpfully, she adds a fifth, that of practical cooperation. She is right to suppose that this is so badly needed in respect of the ecological crisis, which is currently *the* crucial case of theological interaction with the sciences.

Johnson then gives a very clear and accessible summary of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, one that I shall certainly offer my students. Interestingly she also proposes Darwin as a model of a contemplative of nature, and writes very movingly about the importance of deep looking, combining examples from Darwin and Gerard Manley Hopkins. After considering how the theory of evolution has itself evolved, she turns to the question of God's involvement in the evolving biosphere, emphasising the importance of the Trinity, divine immanence and the work of the Spirit. Interesting as this material is, it does not seem to me to add to what has been explored by scholars such as Arthur Peacocke, John Haught, Celia Deane-Drummond, and (especially) Denis Edwards. This is a balanced synthesis of their views, rather than an innovative proposal.

Johnson affirms, as I would myself, not only God's pan-immanent compassion for all creation, but also divine engagement with every element of the created world in 'deep incarnation', in Niels Gregersen's phrase.

This line of thinking tends to hover between logo-centric restatement of divine omnipresence, and some form of soteriological statement about the redemption of creation. Johnson does not indicate where she herself stands on this. But her extension of the concept, in writing of 'deep resurrection', is interesting.

The author then turns to the question of God's providential action - an under-explored area in relation to evolution. She follows Edwards in espousing a neo-Thomist model of primary and secondary causality. But her own emphasis is striking - she wants to insist that creaturely secondary causes are not the instrument of God's purposes, but act in freedom.

In a sense every model of divine action must involve a view of primary and secondary causes. God is everywhere present to every event, and yet this is not a magical world but a world of empirically testable regularities. But it is hard to sustain the view that God has no long-term purposes in creation, that God did not desire certain ends. (Ruth Page does defend such a view, but is not cited here.) And if natural processes are free and do not serve divine purposes, it is hard to see why their freedom is a value, or at least a value sufficient to set against the disvalues these processes cause. A God who uses suffering-causing processes to give rise to divine ends faces a certain charge within theodicy, of having used creaturely suffering as a means to an end. But in a way a God who simply turns loose suffering-causing processes, without an underlying purpose, is just as culpable. And for all Johnson's affirmation of the

Spirit's immanent and empowering engagement with the unfolding of creation, it is hard to see what difference this is taken to make, beyond the gift of freedom to the world to make itself.

The question of theodicy must be central to any theological contemplation of evolution. How is it that God made, or allowed to evolve, a nature so red in tooth in claw? Johnson proposes a compound theodicy based on the value of freedom of process, plus God's compassionate engagement with every creature, plus the eschatological hope of a new life purged of suffering. Although I might have constructed such a position somewhat differently, I am convinced this is the right type of approach to take.

Readers of this journal will be concerned at the lack of really up-to-date material in evolutionary biology - the book referred to in Johnson's summary of recent developments was published in 1985. Perhaps Johnson is so keen to emphasise the scientific consensus on evolution that she is reluctant to explore current controversies. But the themes of convergent evolution, as explored by Simon Conway Morris, and evolutionary cooperation, as reflected on theologically by Sarah Coakley in her 2012 Gifford Lectures, are huge omissions. Both may significantly alter the character of the narrative Darwin constructed (with, as Patricia Beer and others have shown, specific rhetorical intent). Fascinatingly, recent work by Niles Lehman and his group on cooperative behaviour among oligo-ribonucleotides

suggests that the importance of cooperative strategies may go all the way back into the proto-biotic world.

After consideration of what humans are, considered as evolved animals but emerging as a ‘singularity’, a uniquely gifted and powerful species, the book ends with a passionate appeal for us to take our place in the community of creation and develop a spirituality of wisdom that learns from the natural world and takes a less exploitative and unsustainable role in relation to it. Again, this is a beautifully written section, though arguably it does not offer any novel contributions. She follows Richard Bauckham in his understanding of creaturely praise; perhaps a little more critical engagement with this concept (as one sees for instance in the work of my colleague David Horrell) would have been merited here.

This is a book that could be given to any articulate and exploring church group, and could be used in first or second-year undergraduate teaching. Johnson adds her passionate and persuasive voice to those calling for a robust engagement with the realities of an evolving world, and for a real sense of our (humble) part in the community of creation. There are constituencies, especially within North American Christianity, that urgently need to hear both calls. I wish I thought they would be likely to listen to this eloquent plea.

BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW:

Richard J. Coleman, *State of Affairs: The Science-Theology Controversy*. Lutterworth, 2014.

Celia Deane-Drummond, Sigurd Bergmann and Bronislaw Szerszynski (eds.), *Technofutures, Nature and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ashgate, 2015.

John Hart, *Encountering E.T.I.: Aliens in Avatar and the Americas*. Lutterworth, 2014.

David Knight, *Voyaging in Strange Seas: The Great Revolution in Science*. Yale University Press, 2014.

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Roger Trigg and Justin L. Barrett (eds.), *The Roots of Religion: Exploring the Cognitive Science of Religion*. Ashgate, 2015.

Gernot Wagner and Martin L. Weitzman, *Climate Shock: The Economic Consequences of a Hotter Planet*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*. IVP, 2015.

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Please contact her on L.Hickman@newman.ac.uk

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