

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	2
EDITORIAL	3
2009 CONFERENCE	4
NOTICE OF THE 2010 CONFERENCE	6
THE ARTHUR PEACOCKE ESSAY PRIZE 2010	6
OBITUARY – DR PETER HODGSON	8
REVIEWS	
Gaymon Bennett, Martinez J. Hewlett, Ted Peters, Robert John Russell (eds), <i>The Evolution of Evil.</i>	10
Review article by Nicola Hoggard Creegan	
Russell, Robert John, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger (eds), <i>Scientific perspectives on divine action: Twenty years of challenge and progress.</i>	19
Reviewed by Ernst Conradie	
Bill Kramer, <i>Unexpected Grace: stories of faith, science and altruism.</i>	25
Reviewed by Richard Skinner	
Alister E. McGrath, <i>The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology.</i>	28
Reviewed by Louise A. Hickman	
Michael Murray, <i>Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering.</i>	37
Reviewed by Robin Attfield	
Mark Vernon, <i>Science, Religion and the Meaning of Life.</i>	41
Reviewed by Peter Colyer	
Willis Jenkins, <i>Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology.</i>	43
Reviewed by Christopher Southgate	
Alister & Joanna McGrath, <i>The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine.</i>	46
Reviewed by Michael Poole, reproduced with permission from <i>Science and Christian Belief</i>	
PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE FORUM	51
BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW	52

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Professor Robin Attfield is Professor of Philosophy at Cardiff University.

Professor David Bartholomew is a former Chairman of the Forum and editor of *Reviews*. He is Emeritus Professor of Statistics at the London School of Economics and author of several books in the field of science and religion.

Dr Peter Colyer is Fellow of the Centre for Christianity and Culture of Regent's Park College, Oxford, and Secretary of the Science and Religion Forum.

Professor Ernst Conradie is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape.

Dr Nicola Hoggard Creegan is Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School, New Zealand.

Dr Louise Hickman is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at Newman College, Birmingham.

Richard Skinner is a therapist/counsellor and writer, currently conducting research at Exeter University into connections between evolutionary psychology and spirituality.

EDITORIAL

Looking out through heavy rain at the hills of Dartmoor, and enjoying a very brief respite between avalanches of marking, I ponder another issue of *Reviews*. I am particularly delighted to add to our cohort of reviewers a scholar from South Africa (the distinguished ecotheologian and hermeneutician Ernst Conradie) and one from New Zealand, Nicola Hoggard Creegan, who contributes our review article. Also Robin Attfield, about to step down from his chair in Philosophy at Cardiff. I wish him long and happy retirement (how is it that the only people one passes in the corridors of British universities who retain a gleam in the eye and a thirst for the next task are those who have retired?).

As you will see from the last couple of pages of this issue there is no shortage of books arriving for review. Offers to review these are very welcome! There is of course a battery of work - books, television, radio and conferences - prompted by the Darwin bicentenary. Of these I especially look forward to engaging with two books due out shortly - *Theology Beyond Darwin*, edited by Michael Northcott and Sam Berry for Paternoster, and *Reading Genesis after Darwin* edited by Stephen Barton and David Wilkinson for OUP - and of course to the SRF Conference on evolutionary themes in Cambridge in September (see the notice following).

To the great disappointment of the Committee of the Forum no essay worthy of the Peacocke Prize was received in the first round of the competition. For the next round we have removed the age restriction (see below). The closing date will be December 31 2009. Would those teaching in the science-religion field please commend it to their students!

The Forum notes with sadness the passing of the first Editor of *Reviews*, Dr Peter Hodgson, distinguished physicist and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. David Bartholomew, his successor as Editor, kindly contributes an obituary.

**2009 SCIENCE AND RELIGION FORUM ANNUAL
CONFERENCE**

***Evolving Darwinism:
From Natural Theology to a Theology of Nature***

Wesley House, Cambridge

Tuesday 8th to Thursday 10th September 2009

In this anniversary year of the birth and major publication of Charles Darwin, the Forum's conference will examine the ways in which Darwinian ideas have themselves evolved over 150 years, and the continuing impact of evolutionary thought on religious faith. The main speakers will be:

Professor Sam Berry, London: *Biology since Darwin*
Respondent: Celia Deane-Drummond

Professor David Fergusson, Edinburgh: *Natural Theology since Darwin*
Respondent: Sarah Coakley

Professor John Brooke, Oxford, Lancaster and Durham:
Christian Darwinians
Respondent: David Knight

Dr Denis Alexander, Cambridge: *A Critique of Intelligent Design*
Respondent: Sjoerd Bonting

Drs Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson,
Exeter: *From Origin of Life to Incarnation: A New Theology of Evolution*
Respondent: Kenneth Wilson

Short papers on the Conference theme (maximum 15 minutes presentation time, to be followed by 10 minutes discussion) may be submitted by participants.

Proposals for short papers, in the form of a title and a 200 word summary, should be sent by **June 22nd** to Dr Andrew Robinson at a.j.robinson@exeter.ac.uk .

The Conference is open to members and non-members of the Science and Religion Forum. The Forum is an open group of people exploring the relationship between scientific knowledge and religious faith, and welcomes participants of any religion or none.

The Conference will be held in Wesley House, Cambridge, from the afternoon of Tuesday 8th to lunchtime on Thursday 10th September. Wesley House is a Methodist theological college and a component part of the Cambridge Theological Federation within the University, and is located a comfortable walking distance from the centre of the city. Most accommodation for the conference will be in single rooms, and similar additional places will be available in other college accommodation nearby.

Conference Bookings must be received in full by July 31st

To qualify for early booking discount, the full fee must be received by July 1st .

Bursaries are available to those who have been members of the Forum for at least six months, and who have no financial assistance from employers or sponsors. Students in full-time education may also apply for a bursary even if they are not yet members of the Forum. Please complete the relevant section of the Booking Form.

For further information about the Conference or the Science and Religion Forum see www.srforum.org or contact the Secretary: peter.colyer@regents.ox.ac.uk

ADVANCE NOTICE OF THE 2010 CONFERENCE

The 2010 Science and Religion Forum conference will be held in Edinburgh from 7th to 11th April 2010 in conjunction with the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT). The theme of the 2010 conference is “Is Religion Natural?”. Further information will be posted on www.srforum.org in late June.

**ARTHUR PEACOCKE ESSAY PRIZE 2010:
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS**

In memory of its founding President and former Chairman, the Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke, the Forum offers a prize for an essay directly relevant to the theme of its annual conference. The purpose of the prize is to encourage scholars embarking on a career in the field of science-and-religion. *This call is for submissions relating to the 2010 conference* (see above) on the theme: Is Religion Natural?”

The prize is open to those who, on the closing date for submission, are matriculated students (full-time or part time, undergraduate or post-graduate) registered at a UK university. The prize will consist of a cash award of £100, free membership of the Forum for one year, and the UK travel and accommodation costs of the winner’s participation in the Forum’s 2010 conference. An abstract of the winning essay will be published in the Forum’s *Reviews in Science and Religion*, and the full text posted on its website.

The essay should not exceed 5000 words in length, including footnotes but excluding references. It should be preceded by an abstract of no more than 250 words, and should be submitted as an email attachment in Word, no later than 31st December 2009 to Dr Louise Hickman: l.hickman@newman.ac.uk. Dr Hickman will

answer any questions about the prize. All submissions will be acknowledged within 1 week of receipt.

The essay should be the original work of the applicant – unacknowledged quotation from the work of others will automatically disqualify the entry. Copyright in the essay will remain with the author. Each submission should be accompanied by a statement from the author's Supervisor or Head of Department, confirming the author's student status and indicating awareness that the essay has been submitted. The adjudicators reserve the right not to award the Prize if no entry of sufficient standard is received. Their decision will be final, and no correspondence about it will be entered into.

OBITUARY**Peter Edward Hodgson, 1928 - 2008**

Peter Hodgson was the first editor of *Reviews*. The Forum decided to publish *Reviews* at its meeting in Guildford in April 1982 and Peter took on the job of editor, producing the first issue in June of that year. He continued in that role, producing two issues a year, until May 1997, at which point I took over from him. The original intention was to publish reviews that had already appeared elsewhere and members were encouraged to contribute reviews they had already written for other journals. That policy continued throughout Peter's tenure, although there were also notices about forthcoming SRF events. However, as I can testify from my shorter tenure, the unrelenting schedule which such a publication routine imposes requires discipline, which brings its own rewards, but it also consumes many hours of time.

Peter graduated in Physics from Imperial College, London in 1948 and then went on to obtain a Ph.D. in 1951. After spells at University College London, working with H.S.W. Massey, and Reading he moved to Oxford where he became Head of the Nuclear Physics Theoretical Group and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College. He remained there until his retirement. He published 11 textbooks and about 350 articles. His book *Theology and Modern Physics* (Ashgate, 2005) was reviewed in *Reviews* 47 by Russell Stannard who concluded by saying "There is much in this book that is highly commendable. It is just that at times it is somewhat contentious. But that need not be a bad thing!" In addition to his own research Peter spent much time pursuing his interest in the impact of science on society. He was on the Council of the Atomic Scientists' Association from 1952 to 1959 and he edited its journal from 1953 to 1955. In later years he became President

of the Science Secretariat of Pax Romana and a consultant to the Pontifical Consilium for Culture. His concern for the Church to be thorough and professional in matters relating to science and religion was evident in all that he did.

The Forum was fortunate to obtain such a well-qualified person to launch its new venture and its present success owes much to the foundation which he laid.

David J Bartholomew

REVIEW ARTICLE

Gaymon Bennett, Martinez J. Hewlett, Ted Peters, Robert John Russell (eds), *The Evolution of Evil*.

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, pp. 368, ISBN 978-3-525-56979-5, €62-90.

REVIEW ARTICLE BY NICOLA HOGGARD CREEGAN

There are few issues more central to the plausibility and integrity of Christian theology than the problem of evil as raised by evolutionary theory. Nor are there issues so commonly overlooked. Once the Genesis Fall may have explained all evil from murder to earthquake and tsunami; 'Genesis' and 'Fall' stood as code words neatly placing wrong on the side of humanity and exonerating God from all responsibility for suffering. Even where no deep metaphysical or historical claims are being made the rubric of creation fall and redemption still often stands at the heart of Christian theology today. Slowly, though, deep time is beginning to impinge upon our consciousness. We have now to consider the fact that God has brought creation into being by a process that is extraordinary in its breadth and depth, but is at the very least full of carnage and predation and suffering of sentient animals and the extinction of many complex and beautiful forms. Theologians grapple with the meaning of natural selection, and the possibility that the loving God might be hidden behind a seemingly mechanical and random process whose only interest is the survival of small impersonal segments of information. In human beings evolution has thrown up a species which is capable of unimaginable harm and at the same time is disturbed by its own origins and the repercussions they may have for ethics.

Theists are at times left with weak arguments in defense of faith and of God: God is present but not visible in the natural world and its history; God has

purposes for the creation even though none is evident; God is knowable only through special revelation; God promises a resurrection for the final products of a process that is on the whole wasteful and destined to end in destruction. God demands from us an ethic at odds with the whole thrust of evolution. God uses suffering for our own good even though all suffer to quite different degrees. Are there any better arguments than these?

This book will be invaluable to all those who have pondered or agonize over these questions, whether they be students, theologians, scientists or thoughtful believers. Some of the chapters usefully recover old ground or place the problem in its historical context (Peter Hess on Roman Catholic positions, Michael Ruse on Christianity and Darwinism, or Nathan Hallanger on eugenics). Almost all chapters, however, offer something new and dig deeply into the complexity of the problem, even when answers require a thorough rethinking of our theology or our science.

In the past theodicy arguments have revolved around several standard approaches. God has left humans free and hence the evil, or God has absented Godself from the creation in a form of extended kenosis in order that human freedom might operate. God has created the best of all possible worlds. Suffering is not ultimately bad; it is the process of soul making, of discerning the good, of building character and fortitude. Most of these arguments, however, work best if only the tiny span of human history is considered. What of animals who suffered long before humans were around, animals we now know are so much like us in emotional response? To give deeper answers requires extensions of these arguments—perhaps not only humans but all creatures must be free, as suggested by Joshua Moritz. Perhaps not only is kenosis a part of creation but central to the nature of God as Christopher Southgate proposes. In a form of the best of all possible worlds argument Patricia

Williams contends that evolution is a process that at the very least throws up more good than evil, that is self replicating and in the rise of humanity is producing of morality and purpose and hence self redeeming. Many of the essays acknowledge that soul making does not meet the objections of horrendous evil and that the openness to the future that the evolutionary process itself reveals is consistent with the hope that the theology of cross and resurrection has always proclaimed.

Whatever theologians might say about evil in the evolutionary process, however, sociologists and psychologists often have very simple and very powerful competing theories, or theories that make religious interpretation appear redundant. Ted Peters is critical of sociobiology but sees in its determinism links with original sin. He notes well that Christian theology has not shied away from doctrines of sin as bondage. Hence Peters' answer is the theology of the cross; God is hidden, but has joined us in suffering on the cross. In this Peters is giving a theological means by which humans can rise above their bondage, a reason much more compelling than Dawkins' hand waving. Peters points to the change inherent in the evolutionary process and the way in which this then gives us hope from future. Left somewhat unresolved is the question of why God did it all this way to start with, but an implicit best of all possible worlds doctrine hovers behind this interesting argument. In similar vein, James Haag gives limited affirmation to evolutionary psychology because it helps us to remember that we are not blank slates, and that even if culture trumps genes in some cases the complex biological interrelationships will always be with us.

One of the most interesting modifications of these arguments because the object of discussion is God, and because of the breadth of his argument, is that by Christopher Southgate. He does face the theodicy problem raised in particular by animal suffering, and

argues that this suffering cries out for some sort of redemption and indeed there are hints in Scripture that this is so. In a chapter that interacts widely with sources from Gerald Manley Hopkins to Holmes Rolston, Ruth Page and von Balthasar he develops a theory of “deep intratrinitarian kenosis” (63). The love of the Father in begetting the Son brings about an otherness “that enables God’s creatures to be ‘selves’”. This “selving” is possible at all levels of creatureliness, but he also argues that humans may have a role in redeeming or in taming the other orders of nature and especially the sentient creatures. This chapter is developed more fully in his recent book *The Groaning of Creation*¹ and is particularly noteworthy in the extent to which he is willing to take seriously the ambiguity of creation, and the way in which no future evolutionary good can ever compensate for the evil of animal suffering and extinction.

At the end of the first section framing the question for subsequent chapters Russell reminds us that the search to understand evil is always going to be flawed for we ourselves are caught up in evil’s claws. He faces squarely the big pictures: that the mix of perfection and evil we glimpse in nature can no longer be explained by the archetypal story that sits at the kernel of Christian theology—the drama of creation, fall and redemption. He affirms that the Christian God has promised to remove all suffering in the long run, but asks where did it come from to start with? What do we do with the knowledge we seem to have that death is so important for the possibility of life? Russell makes no bones about the depth of this challenge for Christian life. After examining traditional approaches which dismiss or mitigate the problem of suffering and waste in the evolutionary process Russell turns to physics as

¹ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008)

containing within it both the possibility of order and beauty but also in entropy the possibility of destruction and dissipation. He too sees some echo here of the boundedness which was always present in the Augustinian model of fall and redemption. He is ultimately drawn however to Hick's recasting of Schleiermacher. Pain and suffering are soul making and he argues that God must keep a certain "epistemic distance" if moral agency is to be possible. The problem with this approach has always been horrendous evil, or what Hick calls "excessive violence." Hick and Russell again see some answer in the redemptive hope of the future. Thus this call of the future and the theology of the cross are recurring themes.

The unspoken concern in all this discussion is whether the science as it has been presented, especially in the works of purer forms of Darwinism like that of Dawkins, is the whole story. Theology at times appears to be straining to meet the impossible demands of natural selection which is so obstinately non-teleological. How can this be reconciled with a purposeful God whose spirit enlivens all life and matter? One possibility has always been that natural selection is not the whole story. It is interesting that there have emerged two different schools—that of Dawkins which sees evolution as somewhat ordered and repeatable, and that of S.J. Gould which stresses contingency. These two different philosophical understandings hint of deeper discord. And indeed new perspectives always emerge which condition and change the meaning of previous theories. In this case there is a growing scientific literature which does affirm that other evolutionary dynamics are important. This literature may not quite be a paradigm shift in terms of evolutionary science but it is ground changing relative to theology. Simon Conway Morris is notable for insisting that *telos* not be removed from evolutionary descriptions

and Ian Stewart reminds us of the deep mathematics and physics that undergird the evolutionary process.²

Even in Darwin's day Fleeming Jenkin talked about the constraints on the evolutionary process and the way in which these might make more sense of an evolutionary theism. For if constraints or more dynamic principles are at work these are consistent with teleology in a way that natural selection never has been. These new perspectives are taken up in an important chapter by Joshua Moritz who challenges head on the purity of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Drawing on the work of Stuart Kauffmann and Lynn Margulis he looks at the now burgeoning ideas of developmental constraints, self organization, complexity, and symbiosis, which give a quite different emphasis to evolutionary theory, making natural selection and its anti-teleological weight no less true but less important. This shift in evolutionary theory makes less oblique the presence of God in the evolutionary history and is undoubtedly the source of the "divine wisdom" which Dembski and other ID theorists discern in nature. This new biological emphasis, however, does not instantly solve all problems of theodicy for waste and carnage and predation remain along with these other more positive constraints and pressures. Moritz concludes his very informative chapter, then, with what he calls the "Free Creatures extension" to the free-process defense.

In a related way matters of design always hover as an issue ever since Darwin overturned Paley, and they are so much present in popular and political ponderings on evolution. It was gratifying, then, to find an essay by William Dembski among the mix. Too often the discussion of design is caught up in these polarized

² Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Ian Stewart, *Life's Other Secret: the New Mathematics of the Living World*, (New York: Wiley, 1999)

forms of discourse which assume on both sides that ID is necessarily anti-evolution or a cover for creationism. Very often scientists reveal their disdain for any hint of affirmation of design as closet creationism even though this affirmation was at the core of religious response for most of human history. This scientific anger reveals, I think, one particularly hard line atheistic position—that religion is to be tolerated unless it dares to conclude that God can be seen as well as believed by faith. Thus Dembski's even and fair minded chapter is a welcome reposte to such charges. He argues that the detection of the presence of "divine wisdom" in nature allows the kind of defense which convinced Job. It does not explain evil but it allows us to be assured of God's presence. This is very far from the caricature of ID as anti-evolutionary and arguing only for an interventionist God, which does indeed make any theodicy impossible. Dembski's chapter draws on Kant's theodicy, and is free of some of the distracting mathematical detail that characterise his longer work.

John Haught is a towering presence within discussion of faith and Darwin. He has often proffered some version of kenosis, working out of a Teilhardian paradigm. In the essay in this volume he looks again the concept of perfection in Genesis given that the old paradigm of perfection fall and redemption no longer works. He argues that the concepts of fall and of original sin "remind of us the radicality of our need for redemption." He calls for the "transpositioning" of the concept of perfection from the past into the future. If theology were to work consistently in this manner it would help also dismantle the theodicies of punitive expiation, with their accompanying encouragement of violence. He too points to the promise of the God of the future.

The last section is more human focused, looking directly at the impact of science on our theological anthropology and the enlarged and interconnected understanding it gives us of ourselves (Martinez

Hewlett). There are also interesting and perceptive chapters on genocide. Gaymon Bennett examines the associations between biology, biopower and human ordering of life, especially in eugenics. This knowledge he argues is necessary for theology and for any understanding of evil. Nathan Hallanger details the shocking link between social Darwinism and eugenics in the twentieth century, and especially the link with liberal theology which on the whole supported these movements. He emphasizes the irony of the non-teleological Darwinism giving rise to the profoundly teleological eugenics programme. Two chapters examine scapegoating and mimesis. Derek Nelson invites us to keep telling the story of genocide and evil because a part of its power lies in our human tendency to forget, the long forgotten Armenian genocide being a case in point. René Girard sees redemption in the unmasking of violence that the biblical and in particular the Christ story provides. He reminds us that we too are a part of the crowd that would indeed have crucified Jesus, that it is the human evolved condition that is the problem.

George Murphy concludes theologically with affirmations that God is suffering with us within the evolutionary process and that God as human is also cousin of the apes and on the side of the losers in the great history of life. He argues that incarnation and cross were always a part of God's plan and that this suggests that the development of higher forms of life bring with them a cost which is borne at least in part by God.

There are recent books which have given deep and compelling treatment of theodicy like David Hart's *The Doors of the Sea*³, but in that book deep time and science are almost completely absent. We are left with the questions; why has God done it this particular way,

³ David Bentley Hart *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)

and then given us a story of perfection that taunts and haunts us with its lack of veracity? *The Evolution of Evil*, however, attempts in a number of different ways to get under the skin of this problem. The strength and diversity of the different voices only deepens the book's collective impact.

Lurking behind these essays but largely left unanswered, however, is the question of whether life, but especially human life, has some tragic dimension. The tragedy so acutely portrayed in the Genesis story seems to be left dangling. Might it not be the case that just as perfection can be reconceptualized—as Haught has argued-- so also might this sense of tragedy? While there was never a temptation in the garden in the way we once believed, nor a paradise from which humanity fell, temptation nevertheless might still be an important element in the evolution of evil. Strangely absent from most current discourse in this area is the whole biblical world of other powers, referred to variously as the serpent, Satan, the demonic, or as powers and principalities. In Genesis, and in the gospels, there is a sense of doing battle with these powers and that they are not to be taken lightly. I am not advocating any return to demonology or to an unhealthy interest in the outworking of evil, only to a recognition that we may be ignoring an important aspect of biblical reality, and that in these realities may be a partial complementary explanation to the other answers proffered in *The Evolution of Evil*.

Christ goes out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Peter speaks for Satan when he suggests only that Jesus need not die. Jesus delivers people from demons as often as he heals. He is aware always of this other world, the world that seems to take humans into its orbit so that they “know not what they do”. Human struggle is against voices of temptation which promise so much even as they entrap. Is the source of this temptation just an evolved projection or hypostasis of

ourselves, or is there another against which we struggle? If there is ‘another’ we still do not know their ‘story.’ But taking seriously this biblical emphasis on the demonic might give us further avenues in Christology. For if any of this is true then Christ comes not only in solidarity with our suffering, and with the suffering of all life, and to save us from our sins, but also as *Christus Victor*, to resist and ultimately defeat the evil which has afflicted all life from the beginning.

REVIEWS

Russell, Robert John, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger (eds), *Scientific perspectives on divine action: Twenty years of challenge and progress*. Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications / Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2008; paperback, pp. xxv + 354, ISBN 978-88-209-7961-4, £26-50.

REVIEWED BY ERNST CONRADIE

This volume of essays, as indicated by the title, serves as the “capstone” for a research project that explored scientific perspectives on divine action. This project was co-organised by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley. The editors of this volume, namely Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy and William Stoeger also served as the steering committee for this project. The project itself extended over a period of almost twenty years and was structured around six major conferences leading to six substantial volumes of essays. This volume followed the final “capstone” conference held at Castel Gandolfo in Italy in September 2003. The earlier volumes explored divine action with reference to scientific discourse in the areas of quantum cosmology, chaos and complexity,

evolutionary biology, the neurosciences and quantum mechanics. The purpose of the final conference was to reflect on and assess the progress that was made during the project, to consolidate the insights and terminological distinctions and to clarify the positions of some of the major participants.

This volume includes contributions by Robert John Russell and George Ellis offering “critical appraisals on the series as a whole”, by Philip Clayton, Nancey Murphy and Wesley Wildman on a “philosophical analysis of specific issues in the series” and by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Arthur Peacocke, William Stoeger, Thomas Tracy, Keith Ward, Kirk Wegter-McNelly and Mark Worthing on a “Theological analysis of specific issues in the series”. Each of the essays thus offers a review of the series as a whole, in some cases focusing on specific issues that cropped up throughout the series. Unfortunately, Russell’s own position, discussed in detail in his recent *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega* (2008), was not included in the capstone volume.

It is impossible to comment here on each of the essays individually. In fact, how does one review so many different reviews of a 20 year project in which some 53 top scholars contributed 105 essays? How does one map the different attempts to map the various theories of divine action? How does one assess the diverging assessments of the outcomes of the project? Clearly an overview of such overviews would scarcely be meaningful.

There is virtual consensus in the essays that this project set a benchmark for any further reflection regarding scientific perspectives on divine action and indeed for science and religion dialogue as a whole. This has everything to do with the meticulous planning and dedication of the editors and, as Russell comments, “the extraordinary gifts of time, talent, vision, erudition, honesty, self-criticism, dedication and joy which the

participants in this series have brought to the process” (p. xxv). The claim of the project, as indicated in the subtitle of the book, is that this could be regarded as a form of *progress*. Russell explains: “... this series represents a milestone in the burgeoning scholarly interaction among science, philosophy, and theology. In my view the series has provided a lasting resource for future scholars, especially those entering the field. And it has discovered new, or enhanced existing, problems which may now be more effectively addressed – which I take to be a true mark of intellectual progress. I firmly believe that this series of publications has taken all of us in, through, and beyond many of the peaks and valleys that twenty years ago lay only in the dim distance, barely if at all perceived, let alone understood” (p. xxv). These are rather lofty claims since the term “progress” is not often used in a discipline where some have suggested that we have only been able to add some 25 centuries of footnotes to Plato’s works. Yet, I have no doubt that such claims would be more appropriate with respect to this project than to almost any other joint research programme in the field. However, this reinforces questions around the substantive outcomes of the project. Let me offer a few comments in this regard:

Firstly and crucially, the project contributed towards terminological clarification and stabilising regarding key terms such as the status of the “laws of nature”, various forms of determinism and the corresponding kinds of “gaps”, the relationship between law and necessity, emergence and downward causation, special and general divine action, whether such special divine action is compatible or not with such determinism, objective, functional and subjective views on divine action, direct and indirect, immediate and mediated forms of divine action and so forth. Curiously, distinctions that were earlier taken as fairly clear were questioned again right towards the end of the project. This is evident from Gregersen’s and Stoeger’s essays on special / general

divine action (in different directions), from Tracy's essay on direct and indirect acts of God, from Wegter-McNally's essay on various forms of compatibilism and from Worthing's essay on non/interventionist notions of divine action. This is rather disconcerting, but it does demonstrate the open-endedness of the debate. Future scholars using such terms would need to do that with reference to the discussion in this project.

Secondly, although this project has established a methodology for dialogue between theology and the sciences, one that encourages the highest possible level of mutual interaction or "traction" (Clayton) between them, it should also be clear that there is no consensus on the issue of divine action itself. This is hardly surprising but nevertheless sobering to consider that a project of such magnitude could not elicit some ecumenical consensus. In fact, the project included a limited number of contributions on divine action itself (25 out of 91 essays before this volume) and allowed a wide variety of other peripheral research agendas in the background.

The project at least clarified the various positions on non-interventionist divine action. Although these positions were mapped in distinct ways by Clayton, Ellis, Peacocke, Russell, Tracy and Wildman, the maps overlap sufficiently with one another so that the state of the current debate (at least in scholarly circles) is clearly outlined. One may presume that Russell's distinction between four forms of causation will remain most influential (p. 35-6). This helps one to distinguish between positions that focus on forms of causation that are "upward" (Russell, Ellis, Murphy, Tracy with increasing hesitation), "lateral" (Polkinghorne), "downward" (Clayton) or through "whole-part influence" (Peacocke). Here we do find "scientific perspectives" on divine action. However, there is also an increasing recognition that these positions are embedded in broader metaphysical frameworks, either neo-Platonist

(Ward), Thomistic (Edwards, Stoeger) or Whiteheadian (Barbour, Haught). Even more crucial is different views on God and God's relationship with the world – ranging from traditional theism (in some evangelical circles) to naturalism (Drees). Since the project focused so much on *scientific* perspectives on divine action, there may well be a need for further *theological* clarification in this regard.

Thirdly, such theological perspectives on divine action may help to clarify the differences between God's acts of creation, continuing creation, providence, redemption, formation, mission and eschatological completion. Although this project tended to focus on "special" divine action (providence and redemption), the scientific perspectives that were solicited continuously privileged reflection on creation and continuing creation. One may hope that the new project on the theodicy problem will, as Russell suggests (p. 26), indeed allow for a stronger focus on redemption and eschatological re-creation, even though the theodicy problem is most often captured under the rubric of the doctrine of God. There is a danger that the interest in *natural* suffering will thwart such a shift in emphasis so that all theological reflection is again subsumed under the rubric of creation theology. There is an urgent need to do justice to *both* creation *and* redemption as aspects of God's work. In the Protestant tradition the prime example of divine action is the preaching of God's Word, especially in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. The question here is how human words can serve as the carrier of God's Word? It is not clear that this entire project got to the point where such an example could be considered. Instead, the focus on providence allowed for an interest in suffering, but not to explore the most obvious roots of such suffering in human evil (the structural dimensions of sin). As Ellis points out (p. 82), such reflection should be done in conversation also with the human and the social sciences (economics, sociology

and literary studies).

Finally, there is a need for all involved in this discourse to remind ourselves that the question concerning divine action may itself easily become preposterous. To inquire how God may be able to act in the world may be born from pastoral concerns around suffering (a lack of God's actions). However, it may also be borne from a sense of intellectual curiosity. Such curiosity may be virtuous, but the danger is that we may fail to recognise our human perspective in this regard. We may raise the question as if we were "playing God". We would then place ourselves in God's position, looking at the world from God's perspective and then wondering how we might act in the world if we were God. Since we are mere mortals we are then prone to get entangled in a myriad of distinctions that cannot even approximate something of God's presumed compassion. This requires a sense of humility, recognising that the very question is a dangerous one that can easily lead us astray. There is much evidence in this project, perhaps especially from the scientists but also in the work of Russell and Stoeger of the epistemic humility that is indeed required in even addressing the question. When a project produces that much words on paper, there comes a time when one may need to realise that silence may be the more appropriate answer (Wildman).

Bill Kramer, *Unexpected Grace: stories of faith, science and altruism.*

Templeton Foundation Press 2007, pp. 244; paperback, ISBN 978-1-59947-112-9, \$22.95.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD SKINNER

In 2003, freelance writer Bill Kramer attended a conference at Villanova University, USA, on the theme of ‘Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism’. Impressed by the presentations and interdisciplinary discussions, and believing that bridge-building between faith, science and altruism would lead to “that holiest of grails: love”, Kramer approached the ‘Institute for Research on Unlimited Love’ which had co-hosted the conference, and was granted access to four studies involving issues of faith, science, altruism and love. This book is an account of his findings.

In the first section of the book he introduces us to Courtney Cowart, a theologian caught up in the attack on the Twin Towers on Sept 11th, 2001. We are with her, and a group of other theologians and priests including Rowan Williams, as they are enveloped in thick smoke and dust sucked into their building through the ventilation system as the South Tower collapses. We are with her as they escape in virtually zero visibility. We are with her as she prepares herself for death as the North Tower collapses. We are with her as – in an incident which would be comic were the circumstances not so appalling – this group of high-powered theologians and spiritual leaders are welcomed into a trailer by a construction worker who explains that he is a born-again Christian and leads them in prayer, unknowingly holding an archbishop’s hand on one side and a Benedictine prior’s hand on the other. We are with her as she later becomes involved in a scheme to provide food, clothing and shelter for the rescue workers.... Thus we are enabled to learn of and reflect on the extraordinary levels of altruism displayed over the

following months by a huge army of volunteers as Ground Zero is gradually cleared, with so many bodies and body parts being disinterred from the staggering mountain of rubble, and lovingly dealt with. It could not fail to be moving, and Bill Kramer writes sensitively and tenderly.

In the second section, he introduces us to 'The Friendship Study', a research project to exploring connections between interpersonal dynamics and group dynamics: does friendship fostered between two individuals from different ethnic groups lead to those individuals developing greater understanding of those other ethnic groups, or does such friendship not get generalised? The third section concerns research into the impact of grace on human behaviour, a project arising from a previous study on forgiveness. Are unearned or unexpected acts of kindness passed on? Does being a recipient of such grace makes one gracious in turn? We learn of one finding that sometimes "unearned kindness brought up sufficient quantities of shame, low self-esteem, weakness and obligation that they negated whatever sense of gratitude came up as well". And the fourth section recounts a research project in which participants, shown a set of videotaped interviews with chronically or terminally ill patients, have their empathy levels measured by their answering a set of nine questions about the experience. This last project has a highly practical aim – to develop an understanding of how caregivers can improve their empathy in their interactions with patients.

Kramer has a breezy, uncomplicated style, sensitive when sensitivity is appropriate, light-hearted on other occasions without demeaning the projects. His being a writer with a long-term, clearly intelligent interest in such matters, but not a front-line researcher himself, is a strength of the book. He doesn't fall into unexplained jargon, and when technical expression are necessary he gives a good lay equivalent. And with each study he

weaves together the objective findings and the subjective reflections of both himself and the researcher(s) in question.

But there are weaknesses. In particular, the concepts of 'love', 'altruism', 'faith' and 'empathy' are notoriously slippery, and there is insufficient discussion of the differing interpretations that are possible. Taking altruism as an example: since the rise of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, altruism has triggered a whole slew of books and articles. E.O. Wilson described it as being one of the biggest challenges for evolutionary theory, and in the effort to understand how it can be compatible with evolutionary theory, altruism has become highly nuanced. A distinction is now drawn between altruism understood from within a moral discourse (altruistic behaviour as manifested by moral agents, such as human beings) and altruism understood from within a biological or evolutionary discourse (altruistic behaviour as manifested by non-moral agents, such as vampire bats sharing a blood meal with other, unrelated vampire bats). Concepts of kinship theory, 'reciprocal altruism' and the like, as detailed in Matt Ridley's *The Origins of Virtue*, have been developed, and I have identified at least eight different phenomena that come under the altruism umbrella.

Further, there is the issue of the relationship between 'altruistic' behaviour and 'ethical' behaviour. It is a common assumption – shared, it would seem, by the author – that altruism is invariably a good thing. But this is not so – one can behave altruistically yet unethically, such as willingly taking the rap for someone else's crime. Altruism is not always to be applauded.

There are similar problems, though not so acute, attending the concept of 'empathy'. Now, it could be argued that these problematic areas of understanding 'altruism' *et al* do not belong in a book of this nature. But surely the ambiguity should be flagged up, for if we

are exploring 'altruism', we should know what, for the purposes of that particular research project, the term does *and doesn't* cover, otherwise the unwary reader could inappropriately generalise the findings to other forms of altruism. A prologue, say, to address these issues would have been immensely helpful.

That said, Kramer clearly does us a service. He has brought together important topics which are central to an understanding of that elusive phenomenon 'human nature'; he has revealed the range of research taking place; he has introduced us to some thought-provoking, counter-intuitive findings; he has clarified how this type of research has practical implications concerning caregiver-patient relationships and the blight of racism; and, finally, he has intrigued the reader.

Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*.

Blackwell 2008, pp. x + 372; paperback, ISBN 978-1-40512-691-5, £23.99; hardback, ISBN 978-1-40512-692-2, £60.00.

REVIEWED BY LOUISE A. HICKMAN

In the fluid and engaging manner that is typical of all his writing, *The Open Secret* sets out Alister McGrath's vision for a twenty-first century Christian natural theology. This is no small task, but McGrath tackles it with characteristic vigour and much deserved aplomb. Recent years have seen a growing interest in natural theology. Once regarded as a branch of the failed Enlightenment project of rationalizing religion and proving God's existence, many contemporary theologians are considering whether it might be reconceived to offer a substantial resource for Christianity in the modern world. The revival and rehabilitation of natural theology has been particularly

influential in those working in the science-theology conversation; Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne and John Haught spring immediately to mind. *The Open Secret* contains a comprehensive account of what McGrath believes natural theology should be: revived because it is a legitimate and defensible undertaking for theologians today but rehabilitated because it should distance itself from its misguided eighteenth century developments. Important too is McGrath's Christian standpoint: Watered-down theism, this is not. It is a particular strength that he offers a defence of a fully fledged Christian theism, while still maintaining an air of epistemic humility: no viewpoint, he believes, can know that it is privileged. Early on in the book, McGrath outlines his task: 'a Christian natural theology' he says 'is the theological counterpart to the general cultural quest for the transcendent' (28). In many ways like Haught here, McGrath begins from the human yearning for meaning and purpose and he argues that Christianity offers both an explanation and an interpretive framework by which the human longing for the transcendent can be explained and fulfilled. McGrath's task is to argue that natural theology from within the Christian tradition is distinctive because it can both inform and transform the human search for the transcendent, while providing a framework for understanding the full range of human experience and longing, encapsulated in the Platonic triad of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. McGrath's distinctive contribution in *The Open Secret* lies in his attempt to integrate a theology of the imagination in his proposed natural theology. This takes his argument beyond that of a claim for the explanatory superiority of a Christian theology.

A theme of right vision or perception runs throughout the book: doing natural theology involves seeing things as they really are; it is a heightened form of perception involving true insight (135). 'Seeing' is not 'perceiving'

because perception involves thinking about, affectively responding to, and interaction with the world around us (221). This imaginative aspect of natural theology means that it is not limited to an intellectual pursuit (256) but involves seeing the world (McGrath borrows heavily from thinkers as diverse as Augustine and Tolkien here) as 'signed' in some way towards the transcendent: the natural leads to the imaginative because, when seen properly, the natural does not merely point towards the transcendent but *becomes* the transcendent (73) and is perceived in a totally different way. The status of nature is thus confirmed: it is not merely a disposable signpost towards a transcendent realm but is integral to the very possibility of natural theology itself. McGrath's is indeed, in Paul Tillich's language, a true theology of nature.

A major strength of this book lies in its attempt to ground a natural theology firmly in the Bible. McGrath discerns a theology of nature within many of the New Testament parables and in the Hebrew Bible, giving the story of the call of Samuel as one particular example. After Samuel hears what he assumes to be Eli call him in the night for the third time, Eli reflects and experiences a 'Gestalt shift' suggesting to Samuel an alternative explanation of events: a seemingly natural phenomenon such as someone calling in the night might instead be reinterpreted as a disclosing of the divine. In a case such as this, McGrath suggests, nature has become a gateway to the transcendent and God is made known through the natural order (176). Underpinning McGrath's understanding of nature is a Christology based in the *logos* theology of John 1:1 (172). The *logos* links creation, incarnation and revelation which grants nature the capacity to disclose the transcendent as the *logos* is embedded in the very structures of the created order, including in the human person and in Christ (233). McGrath makes much of tracing natural theology back to Jesus himself. He adopts John Dominic

Crossan's understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus as a message of an 'open secret'; nature is publicly accessible to all who gaze on it, but has a hidden inner meaning. The parable of the lilies of the field illustrates this well because 'the human capacity to discern the beauty of nature is ... transposed into a theological affirmation of the care of God for humanity' (123). There is no argument here from the evidences of nature to the existence of God but rather an appeal for the listener to consider an aesthetic response to the parable which reinterprets natural occurrences in a theological light. Unlike many working in the science-theology field, McGrath makes a real effort to address issues of biblical criticism, which gives his work some significant depth, as he incorporates an engagement with the Jesus of history and an application of this to contemporary understandings of natural theology.

The motif of nature as an open secret allows McGrath to show a genuine sensitivity to problems of interpretation and helps to explain his understanding of truth. McGrath is insistent that nature is ambiguous or malleable; it has 'a' hidden meaning but it is not capable of being interpreted in any one valid way (125) as it is not an 'objective' reality (143). This is clear to McGrath after a study of the parables themselves. Nature, like biblical texts, needs interpretation, which involves mental processes. This is why McGrath spends much of the first two parts of *The Open Secret* discussing human perception and critiquing what he sees as an Enlightenment account of natural theology. McGrath's psychology of perception affirms the value of transcendent experiences, which are sought out and valued because of their functional significance in advancing human physical, spiritual and psychological well-being (96) (he shows an influence here from Justin Barrett and emphasises the naturalness of religious concepts), and it also affirms the impossibility of an omniscient 'view from nowhere'. Developments in

psychology show us that perception involves both an accommodation to the environment and an assimilation of it: there is no neutral observer or objective knowledge to be had. This leads McGrath to a critique of any concept of nature (prevalent in the eighteenth century) that sees it as objective evidence for God's existence and an uncomplicated source of moral judgements. The Enlightenment, McGrath claims, has failed because there is no universal criteria of rationality or judgement with which to interpret nature (249). Any twenty-first century natural theology must, therefore, begin with the recognition that nature is conceptually and hermeneutically inarticulate (139).

The Open Secret thus attempts to hold together an account of truth that is sensitive to problems of interpretation, while all the time remaining true to a Christian commitment. The 'image of God' is thus interpreted by McGrath in terms of the 'enactive nature of human cognition' (196) which mirrors the enactive nature of God. Both God and human beings are active in the reinterpretation of nature. All interpretations, including those of texts and nature, are culturally conditioned, which means one can't say objectively which interpretation (whether that be Christian, Islamic or atheist etc.) should be preferred (169). McGrath wants to take account of the insights of thinkers such as Alasdair McIntyre as to the impossibility of any agreed-upon criteria of rationality, without being forced to adopt a thoroughly post-modern rejection of all accounts of truth and knowledge. There is some considerable tension here. Christian theology, he suggests, provides an ontological foundation which confirms otherwise fleeting glimpses of reality and which offers an organizing logic (249). Despite a lack of universal criteria, McGrath suggests that tradition specific internal coherence might be one way of distinguishing better or worse accounts of reality (249) and he follows Brunner at times in suggesting that truth

is personal (254) while truth of biblical statements lies in their utility for the perceiver (131). He seems, however, to suggest more than this when he states that the 'best explanation' might be judged by criteria like parsimony, elegance or explanatory power (155); made to sound at times very much like universal rational criteria. He remains committed to the reality of truth and the 'proper' interpretation of nature even if it is not easily discerned, and he wants to maintain that 'natural theology offers and embodies a tradition-specific yet trans-traditional rationality' by situating himself somewhere in between modernity and post-modernity. However, McGrath needs to be clear here about how objective this trans-traditional rationality really is; is it that Christianity can only 'out-narrate' other traditions? If this is the case, the scope for interfaith dialogue or the science-theology conversation is considerably narrow, if not non-existent. Any genuine dialogue between traditions entails some trans-traditional rationality by which trans-traditional judgements can be made. A closer alliance with Charles Taylor might have helped McGrath here and it is something that needs exploring: while McIntyre presents us with the stark choice between the Enlightenment and the Christian tradition, Taylor presents a more optimistic account of the Romantic imagination and its resourcefulness for contemporary thought. Given the role of the imagination in McGrath's natural theology, a consideration of Taylor's account of human self-understanding and its irreducibility to the terms of the empirical sciences would have helped to justify McGrath's implicit acceptance of the English Romantic tradition together with his rejection of both modernism and post-modernism in his conception of truth.

The Open Secret's section on the beautiful is the most evocative and poetic part of the book. McGrath defines beauty as an affective engagement with nature (present in Augustine's account of the love of beauty as the

transposed love of God) and it suggests to McGrath that beauty is the 'transitory intuition of what is eternal', by which he means that the aesthetic experience signifies but does not deliver something of immense and transformative importance, creating an all-important feeling of human longing for what is beyond (282). Again, McGrath distances himself from an eighteenth century mechanistic account of nature: it is not like a watch pointing to a maker or demanding intelligibility but rather (in the language of Hugh Millner) it is the poetry of nature that is important (269). The imagination is central here because it is awe rather than sense-making that is the appropriate theological response to nature; a nature that includes (following Hans Urs von Balthasar, John Henry Newman and C S Lewis) human culture. McGrath sounds at his most Platonic in his discussion of aesthetics: 'Beauty reveals truth by pointing to a realm beyond the visible world of particulars' (289) and the quest for beauty is really the quest for the source of beauty, which is 'mediated through the things of this world, not contained in them' (281). McGrath's largely unacknowledged debt to Platonism (or perhaps more specifically, Neoplatonism) rings through his vision of nature as sign or symbol (close to Porphyry's conception of nature as mythic sign for what remains hidden), his conception of the role of *logos*, his language of true vision and perception, and also the idea of nature as an open secret: Plotinus' philosophy of nature underpins much of the English nineteenth century Romantic account of the role of the imagination in lifting the veil of nature. Despite rejecting Platonism on the grounds of its epistemic bankruptcy, McGrath proposes a pretty thoroughly Christian Platonic ontological account of the beautiful and the true.

A consideration of the good follows on naturally from the true and the beautiful. Being able to 'see' the world as it 'really' is leads to an acknowledgement of the

injustice in the world and helps us to appreciate the inseparability of the good and the true. McGrath suggests that a Christian natural theology leads to a natural law theory of ethics (293). Following Jean Porter, he states that although nature may have different interpretations, Christianity offers a way of 'reading' nature that fully acknowledges its goodness (308). This can make sense of the moral diversity within nature by seeing it through the lens of a salvation, which ultimately redeems and transforms nature. This section of McGrath's work needs most expansion. He needs to do more to expound his account of ethics: does nature provide a vision of human flourishing or should it be interpreted in terms of a more physicalist natural law theory? He never really gives much indication of what his ethic would look like in concrete terms. To his credit, he does acknowledge that nature is not perfect as it is, and there is little hint of a romanticised idealistic account of nature, however his remarks that 'creation was brought into being as beautiful' (207) and his suggestion that disorder has 'crept into the universe' which once was fully ordered with 'original integrity' at the time of creation (206) implies a very traditional and therefore questionable account of the Fall. McGrath requires more engagement with a theodicy that fully considers the history of evolution at this point.

These concerns aside, McGrath has done a stimulating job of taking the role of natural theology beyond that of simply providing an explanation to the deeper questions of life or of satisfying the human thirst for knowledge. The role of the imagination is rich and fertile ground with which to explore the possibilities for a contemporary natural theology and McGrath does this in a way that will engage both academics and students working in the field, but also anyone with a general interest in the role of theology today. There are times when McGrath is unclear about the task of natural theology: although he is keen to avoid seeing it as solely

the provider of a better explanation of the world than atheism, and he wants to avoid seeing it as a purely intellectual pursuit but at times he sounds (and acknowledges that he sounds) very close to Richard Swinburne who in many ways is attempting to do just that, with a revival of what is very much an eighteenth century model of natural theology. In the moments when McGrath insists that natural theology is an empirical enterprise, he therefore sounds closest to an Enlightenment approach. Borrowing another distinction from Tillich, one might ask whether it is an Enlightenment natural theology that McGrath dismisses or whether he is rejecting an Aristotelian empirical natural theology in favour of a more inward ontological Platonic theology. One often yearns for more acknowledgement and critical engagement with the Neoplatonic and English Romantic tradition from which he borrows, but overall McGrath makes a solid case that natural theology deserves to be revived and reconsidered in its full imaginative sense: The atheist's reductive 'unweaving' of the rainbow is not to be rejected because the rainbow necessitates a divine explanation but because such reductionism ignores the awe and poetry of nature discerned by the human imagination. *The Open Secret* therefore goes some considerable way towards offering a framework for understanding the human longing for the good, the true and the beautiful.

Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering.*

Oxford University Press 2008; hardcover, pp. 224, ISBN 978-0199237272, £37-00.

REVIEWED BY ROBIN ATTFIELD

The Introduction rightly represents Darwinism as implying that animal suffering is a serious problem for theism, and suggests that this problem has been significantly neglected by philosophers who are defenders of theism. Readers of this journal will be aware of some recent exceptions to this neglect, published perhaps too recently for Murray to have had time to consider them.

In the opening chapter, the free-will defence is needlessly based on trans-world depravity. While the argument for the logical incompatibility of theism and evil is reasonably rejected, the argument that evil makes theism unlikely to be true is rightly taken more seriously. However, the argument from 'Inscrutability' (which claims that we are in no position to know whether or not there are gratuitous evils) is too readily credited as successful, so much so that Murray has difficulty in defending the search, carried out in the rest of the book, for explanations of natural evil.

In chapter 2, explanations of animal suffering which represent it as either unreal or lacking significance ('neo-Cartesianism') are discussed, but found to be unbelievable, albeit not inconceivable.

Chapter 3 considers explanations of animal suffering which refer to the Fall. The obvious objection is that no human choice can account for pre-human suffering, but some people (young earth creationists) deny that there was any such suffering, while others claim that such suffering was generated by God in anticipation of the Fall so as to equip humanity for the post-lapsarian period. To all such stances, Murray replies with the

Fragility Objection; even if animal suffering could be explained in these ways, the implication is that the vulnerability of nature to being subjected to natural evil by just a few choices of creatures is such that a good God would not have created it thus in the first place. This objection also applies even if the subject of the original Fall was Satan (as supposed by Thomas Chalmers) or a created world-soul (as suggested by N.P. Williams, developing ideas of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa). Whatever else these theories of the Fall may explain, they cannot explain natural evil.

Yet Murray believes that one form of Satanic Fall could still serve to explain natural evil, if the Satanic Fall was followed by large numbers of moral lapses on the part not only of humanity but also of fallen angelic agents (Satan's cohorts) placed in control of regularities governing physics, natural selection, cancers and heart attacks. He suggests that this theory may be capable of surviving the Fragility Objection, as multiple choices of creatures are to blame, as the possibility of (any) free human choices depends on natural regularities, and as spirits placed in charge of such indispensable regularities would perforce wield substantial power. But here another version of the Fragility Objection would, I suggest, be relevant, for God could have created a regular world without placing regularities under the charge of fallible spirits, and so a natural world subject to regularities being taken over for evil purposes by such spirits would once again be one that God need not have created, and might well not have created if good. Besides, if the choice between natural regularities had been subject to these spirits, as Murray considers possible, the world would not have been a creation, but a Manichaeian site of struggle which, contrary to Murray's intentions, theists would have no reason to invoke.

Chapter 4 considers three explanations of animal suffering that turn on benefits to the animals

themselves. Murray first considers but rejects Swinburne's claim that certain goods such as animal actions that cause good outcomes would be impossible in the absence of evils. This is rejected on the basis that the evils need not be pain and suffering, and that those actions for which pain and suffering really are necessary may fail to justify the creation of sentient animals. He next considers and accepts the view that pain is necessary since in the absence of the capacity for pain both humans and animals undergo injuries inimical to their wellbeing, and cites experimental evidence in support of this theory. This section reads like a good reply to the suggestion of Hume's Philo that a good God would have created a painless world, with the function of pain being served by a diminution of pleasure; Murray's move has the potential to serve as a part, however incomplete, of a satisfactory theodicy.

The third suggestion is that animal pain and suffering are somehow necessary for animal immortality, a possibility which Murray credits on the basis of scripture and tradition. However, he struggles to say why pain and suffering would be necessary for this, eventually suggesting that animals had to be endowed with natures both in their role as indispensable components of environments needed for the development of free human creatures (environments subject, presumably, to natural selection) and also as creatures capable of eternal beatitude. Besides stretching credibility, these moves also embody a large dose of metaphysical anthropocentrism which apparently implies that pre-human animals had to be endowed with such a nature in anticipation of the nature that would be required to supply human needs once humanity appeared; and this is a strange destination for a chapter supposed to turn on goods that animals enjoy that are independent of human good.

Chapter 5 finds explanations of natural evil based on the indispensability of nomic (lawlike and diachronic)

regularity successful in part, but unable to explain animal suffering. However, if we combine nomic regularity with the existence of sentient animals whose flourishing is intrinsically valuable but involves the possibility of suffering, then matters may well be otherwise.

Murray, however, seeks in chapter 6 to make good the presumed deficiency by combining nomic regularity with something that it facilitates, the tendency of our world to develop from chaos to (synchronic) order. This tendency is held to be valuable not instrumentally but intrinsically. However, magnificent as this tendency may be, Murray fails to show it to have intrinsic value, and shows little awareness of the intrinsic value literature either. Besides, the kind of order in question seems to be that manifested in humanity; once again, no awareness is shown of the intrinsic value of flourishing non-human or pre-human lives. Instead, we are here informed that no non-humans are persons; and this information is supposedly grounded in revelation. But it is question-begging to invoke revelation when one of the presuppositions of belief in revelation (God's goodness) is at issue.

The short final chapter considers whether combinations of explanations of animal suffering fare better than single ones; but this depends, of course, on the strength of these explanations considered singly. There are several traces in this chapter of goods befalling animals being at last treated more seriously; but perhaps not seriously enough. There are also cases where lack of proof-reading or editing has marginally added to the world's evils, but only for human readers, and not, fortunately, for long-suffering non-humans.

Mark Vernon, *Science, Religion and the Meaning of Life*.

Palgrave Macmillan 2007; hardcover, pp. 224, ISBN 978-0230013414, £19.99.

REVIEWED BY PETER COLYER

The title of Mark Vernon's book will promise some readers an immense sweep of knowledge and philosophy capable of offering an answer to everything. To other readers, perhaps a majority among the subscribers to the Forum's *Reviews*, the title may suggest yet another manifesto on the relationship between science and religion, increasingly recognised as the two great pillars of modern epistemology. In fact, the book is neither of these. Science does not feature prominently, accounting for only about a fifth of the content. Science provides part of the modern intellectual milieu within which Vernon describes his experiences, his aim in these pages being to show the many aspects of human experience untouched by science. One wonders whether the book's title was imposed by the publisher to attract the attention of the growing interest in science and religion.

The book is a personal well-written account of Vernon's journey from Christian faith to atheism, and his return bounce to a positive form of agnosticism, in which he is open to religious experiences in his search for the unknowable God. A better title might have been *Positive Agnosticism* or *A Defence of Christian Agnosticism*, for it is undoubtedly the Christian God towards whom Vernon directs his doubtful enquiries. Agnosticism is, he says, a Christian phenomenon.

Vernon trained for the Anglican ministry and served for three years as a curate in the High Church tradition. He then lost his faith, partly because the God whom he represented was "not an object or even ultimately a 'who'" and partly because of his frustration with the Church's obsession with orthodoxy and other recent issues publicly well known. He decided he was an

atheist and renounced his ministry. Following an initial sense of liberation, after some time atheism also became unacceptable. Vernon found there a “poverty of spirit” and his imagination thwarted. The gods (dis)believed in by atheists would not be worth following anyway. He now professes himself a Christian agnostic – not a careless agnostic offering only a shrug of the shoulders when religion is considered, but an active agnostic, examining religious claims, participating in Christian liturgy especially of a high musical variety, and promoting the practice of silent meditation. But for him God remains, and for ever will remain, unknowable and mysterious, as God defies all the attempts of human language to define his being.

As historical and intellectual models Vernon singles out Socrates and Aquinas – yes, even Aquinas. Socrates the philosopher was always open and enquiring, provoking others to learn and never to regard any issue as closed. The exemplary role of Aquinas the theologian came when he finished his life’s work of theological writing – at the conclusion of years of rational argument and explanations about God, Aquinas recognised that the being of God remained undelineated, unknown, totally different, beyond words. This is the perspective Vernon wishes to maintain. One suspects he would be happy among the Athenians celebrating Theos Agnostos, God Unknown.

For me the most instructive part of the book was Vernon’s analysis of the reasons for the turn of the Christian Church from mystery to certainty, from meaningful myths or symbolism to “logos Christianity”, the use of rationality in search of relevance. He proposes two reasons for this change. First, in contrast with the early centuries of Christian faith when ancient philosophy was respected and used alongside the biblical stories, theology became dominant and philosophy was treated as its servant. And second, more recently the Church has imitated science in the search

for definiteness. The forms of Christianity offering certainty have more popular appeal, says Vernon. But for him, certainty is not true religion because God is unknowable. It is agnosticism that claims a “sense and taste of the Infinite”.

Those in the institutional churches should pay attention to Vernon’s criticisms. It is sad, even tragic, that one sufficiently committed to become ordained should have turned from Christ to Socrates. At the same time, it should be allowed that the unknowableness of God may not be as extreme as he maintains. The divine love may wish to make itself known to whatever degree humanity is able to comprehend.

Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*.

Oxford University Press 2008; hardcover, pp. ix + 363, ISBN 978-0-19-532851-6, £19-99.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER SOUTHGATE

Just occasionally in a life of much reviewing one encounters a really major book. This is such a book. Jenkins is Margaret Farley Assistant Professor of Social Ethics at Yale Divinity School, but his writing on environmental ethics was unknown to me until this theological blockbuster, clearly the fruit of vast reading and keenly intelligent reflection. My practice is to make notes on record cards and often to leave these in the book for easy retrieval. Twenty-four record cards on this dense volume make it hard even to close the book with them inside.

So this is a really important study for anyone interested in how Christian systematic theology might inform ecological ethics, and as I have often remarked before, ecology is a science of great importance, and

therefore such studies are at the cutting-edge of the dialogue between science and theology.

Willis's thesis is that different approaches to ecotheology manifest different understandings of grace. He thinks this is a neglected organising principle (though prefigured in Joseph Sittler), and greatly preferable to sloggng out the agenda set by Lynn White's notorious article of 1967, with its focus on the anthropocentrism of the Christian tradition. So in three opening chapters Jenkins looks at ecojustice, the effort to secure 'modes of Christian respect for nature's standing' (61), stewardship, with its focus on faithful practice, 'describing how to inhabit the providential landscape created by God's special relationship with humans' (77), and ecological spirituality, starting 'from a primary spiritual communion of humanity and earth' (93). Jenkins considers that these three strategies correspond to grace as sanctification, redemption and deification respectively.

Jenkins then brings in a big hitter as ally for each of the three strategies – respectively Aquinas, Barth and Bulgakov (this last drawing heavily also on Maximus the Confessor). So we see deployed not only an acute survey of the range of environmental theologies (with which the book begins) but major scholarship on three diverse figures in the tradition. Jenkins ends by saying that he did not intend to construct a practical ecotheology so much as 'an exercise in ecumenical understanding' (227). But he concludes with a few telling remarks about how his thinking might be applied (acknowledging for example that each of his allies is male, and had problems with gender issues, and also could be considered deficient in emphasis on the Spirit).

It is indeed a major ecumenical study which will help systematicians even if they have no great interest in ecotheology. High points for me included his discussion of Aquinas on predation – revealing that key issue in

ecothology: do we celebrate wild-nature-as-it-is or look to how it should and will be in the eschaton? Also Jenkins' reflection on Bulgakov's comments on kenosis within the Trinity (comments which in turn informed von Balthasar). But there are very many riches in the book – explore them for yourself.

If I have to cite a weakness in the book it would be that sometimes the density of the argument obscures the underlying structure. Jenkins knows so much, and so many things are clear to him, that he occasionally makes excessive demands on the reader. Also, it would have been good to have clarified more the distinction between ecojustice and ecological spirituality, between sanctifying and deifying grace. And after the very good discussion of Aquinas' approach to predation, I would have been fascinated to see Jenkins subject Barth's analysis to equal scrutiny. Lastly, I was infuriated by the system of notes and references, which necessitated in some cases looking up the endnote, referring to the bibliography, and then looking elsewhere in the bibliography for the book in which the article to which the note referred might be found. This was unworthy of such a very important book, one to which I know I shall constantly refer.

REVIEW ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ELSEWHERE

Alister & Joanna McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine.*

SPCK 2007; paperback, ISBN 978-0281059270, pp. 78, £7.99.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL POOLE, REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM *SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF*.

Alister McGrath, who wrote most of the text, has backgrounds in molecular biophysics and theology. Joanna's backgrounds lie in experimental psychology, clinical neuropsychology and psychology of religion. Their book 'sets out to do one thing, and one thing only – assess the reliability of Dawkins' critique of faith in God' (p.xiii). 'Although written in the first person for historical and stylistic reasons, the views and arguments set forth are those of both authors' (p.xiii). On the 'assumption that Dawkins has equal confidence in all parts of his book,' the writers' policy is to 'simply challenge him at representative points' (p.xii).

Alister McGrath's and Richard Dawkins' spiritual journeys have taken them in opposite directions, the former having been an atheist as a young man, his free thinking leading him to become a Christian. Both firmly believe in rationality, which supports Stephen Jay Gould's view that 'Darwinism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs — and equally compatible with atheism' (p.13).

The book addresses four questions, namely, 'Deluded about God?', 'Has science disproved God?', 'What are the origins of religion?' and 'Is religion evil?':—

'Deluded about God?' ...

... starts by correcting Dawkins' astonishing notion of religious *faith*. How many religious believers would recognise anything remotely like their own position in Dawkins' perception of something more accurately termed credulity? The authors follow this item by addressing Dawkins' *argument from improbability* (p.9) for the non-existence of God and his *infinite regress* assertion posing the question 'who made God? The criticism of the latter claim could have been extended to questioning how Dawkins' assertion about sequences (temporal) of cause and effect in an infinite regress could be extended to God, since spacetime comes into being with the universe. A good point is made by asking where the idea of a GUT (Grand Unified Theory) would fit in with Dawkins' argument. His reiterated and puzzling assertion of *God as a scientific hypothesis* (p.6) could usefully have received a little more attention since so much of his cohort of beliefs is precariously underpinned by this philosophically-odd claim: The next section, however, fleshes out some consequences of his mixing up different types of explanation (C.A.Coulson's *God-of-the-gaps*), bringing this examination of five key issues to a satisfactory close.

'Has science disproved God?'

Dawkins' view of the nature of science is identified as a 'late flowering' of 'doctrinaire positivism' (p.18); as 'atheist fundamentalism'; and as 'unswervingly committed to this obsolete warfare model' of the interplay of science and religion. The authors point out that Dawkins' position of denying any limits to science and his 'dogmatic insistence upon the atheist implications of Darwinism is alienating many of the theory of evolution's potential supporters', much to the delight of some members of the Intelligent Design Movement who see Dawkins as helping their cause. 'One

of the greatest disservices that Dawkins has done to the natural sciences', say the McGraths, 'is to portray them as relentlessly and inexorably atheist. They are nothing of the sort'.

'What are the origins of religion?'

The treatment of this third topic starts with a challenge to Dawkins' portrayal of the origins of religion along the lines of anachronistic 'wish-fulfilment' with all its circularity of argument. 'It begins from the assumption that there is no God, and then proceeds to show that an explanation can be offered which is entirely consistent with this. In fact, it is basically an atheistic reworking of Thomas Aquinas' 'Five Ways'...' (p.31). Furthermore, an evolutionary explanation of the origin of religion has no atheistic mileage in it. Something may have evolutionary advantages and still be true.

Some space is then allotted to a critique of Dawkins' narrowly circumscribed, 'very cognitive' description of religion, one which should more reliably 'make reference to its many aspects, including knowledge, beliefs, experience, ritual practices, social affiliation, motivation and behavioural consequences' (p.29). The chapter concludes by looking at 'two of the most unpersuasive, pseudoscientific ideas', namely the 'virus of the mind' and the 'meme'.

'Is religion evil?'

One of the strengths of this book is its concentration on issues arising from Dawkins' handling of the Bible and academic theology. This final section is a model of economy in countering diverse claims about religion being evil and its displacement by a world of atheists being so much better. The authors point out that collecting an almost exclusive list of evil deeds committed by religious people while barely genuflecting

to the countless deeds of love and kindness sponsored by religious beliefs is hardly the way to inspire confidence in the factual base of such asseverations. Extensive empirical evidence on the motivations of suicide bombers, for example, points to a fundamental motivation which is political. Religious beliefs appear to be neither necessary nor sufficient to generate such people (p.50).

To interject a personal note, I first encountered Dawkins' views when his otherwise excellent 1991 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures were characterised by intrusive anti-religious interjections. These appeared singularly inappropriate in an educational series for young people who were offered no alternative viewpoint and the practice seemed to sit uneasily with Dawkins' views about the putative 'indoctrination' of children by religious mentors. He and I engaged in a published written debate in 1994/5¹ and on reading *The God Delusion* (twice) I was struck by a sense of *déjà vu*. Many arguably valid criticisms of Dawkins' anti-religious arguments have been published over the intervening years, but the arguments themselves seem little changed. The kindest interpretation of this would be that the strength of his arguments has stood the test of time. Readers of the McGrath's book must judge for themselves.

I am tempted to wonder whether the words of the Oxford theologian and historian, Aubrey Moore, about Darwinism, may turn out to be applicable to Dawkins' crusade against religion, which, 'under the disguise of a foe, did the work of a friend'.²

¹ The Poole Dawkins Debate [Google] or www.cis.org.uk/resources/dawkins.shtml

² Moore, A.L. (1889) 'The Christian Doctrine of God' in *Lux Mundi*, C. Gore (ed.) 12th edit., 1891, p. 73, London: Murray, cited in Peacocke, A.R. (1986) *God and the New Biology*, p.83, London: J.M.Dent & Sons

In summary, the McGrath's book is hard-hitting, devastatingly perceptive, but fair. The authors do not suffer bad arguments gladly. They conclude that 'For the gullible and credulous, it is the confidence with which something is said that persuades, rather than the evidence offered in its support' (p.64]. Asseveration is not the same as argument. Their book is a very compact rebuttal, in 78 pages, of key assertions and arguments in *The God Delusion*. It is a useful complement to Alistair McGrath's earlier book, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life*.

PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE FORUM

Alex Bentley (ed.), *The Edge of Reason: Science and Religion in Modern Society* (Continuum, 2008) [essays by Denis Alexander, John Hedley Brooke, David Wilkinson and others]

Cornel du Toit (ed.), *The Evolutionary Roots of Religion* (UNISA, 2009, with an essay by Peter Barrett)

Celia Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution* (SCM Press, 2009)

Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (eds), *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals* (SCM Press, 2009)

Michael Pfundner in discussion with Ernest Lucas, *Think God, think Science* (Paternoster, 2008)

John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, *Questions of Truth* (Westminster John Knox, 2009)

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

John B Cobb, Jr., *Back to Darwin* (Eerdmans, 2008)

Henry Garon, *The Cosmic Mystique* (Orbis, 2006)

Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life* (Paternoster, 2008)

Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation* (Lutterworth, 2008)

Alister McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe* (Westminster John Knox, 2009)

Alexei Nesteruk, *The Universe and Communion: towards a neo-patristic synthesis of theology and science* (T&T Clark, 2008)

Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement* (Westminster John Knox, 2009)

Christopher J Preston, *Saving Creation: Nature and Faith in the Life of Homes Rolston, III* (Trinity University Press, 2009)

Diarmid O'Murchu, *Ancestral Grace: Meeting God in our Human Story* (Orbis, 2008)

Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology* (Fortress Press, 2009)

Peter S Williams, *A Sceptic's Guide to Atheism* (Paternoster, 2009)

Charles M Wood, *The Question of Providence* (Westminster John Knox, 2008)