

## Reviews

*The Daughter of Is.* By MICHAEL DAVIDSON. New York: Popular Library, 1978. 351 pages. \$1.75 (paper).

For many years scientists have used the medium of science fiction to popularize their ideas and to make serious comments on the interaction of science and society. Usually writing under pseudonyms, such intellectual giants as Norbert Wiener (the father of cybernetics) and Hannes Alfvén (Nobel laureate in cosmology) have posed scientific threats to fictitious societies in order to make serious commentaries on the effects of scientific advances in the fields in which they are recognized leaders. Professionals in philosophy and religion have not tried this technique nearly as much as the scientists, although their basic concepts are perhaps even more adaptable to this treatment than the "hard" sciences. Michael Davidson is a pen name for a professor of religion, and his *Daughter of Is* provides a welcome contribution to science fiction.

The author's main proposition revolves about directed evolution. In his story he sets up two races of humanoids of the same intelligence and stage of evolutionary development but with opposing genetic potentials for aggression. One group is a docile, vegetarian, farmer type and the other a meat-eating, warrior, hunter species. The story line centers on the continued confrontation of these two genetically engineered species, one designed for peace and the other for war. Davidson concludes that the biologically inherited characteristics in the long run will count for naught. The two species become almost indistinguishable as cultural evolution overrides the genetic.

Although the space men and women from earth are proud of their own atheism, they set out to be gods elsewhere in space and initiate life on a "bioreceptive" planet, genetically manipulating their new humanoids and continuously interfering with their cultural evolution. Much is made of the interaction between the new creatures and their gods. But by clear implication god is the creator and defender of life—all living organisms from a single cell to humanoids. No consideration is given to the rest of the physical world: the hydrogen, the carbon, the oxygen, and so on which are painstakingly put together to make the cells whose evolution is so carefully controlled by the characters in the book. If this had been done, it would have been interesting to have the author's ideas on God or gods. Would he propose a hierarchy of gods—gods for the physical world and gods for the biological—or would he propose god as a mental construct in the minds of his human and humanoid characters? It is in raising these kinds of questions that the book has interest for the *Zygon* audience.

As straight science fiction, *Daughter of Is* will not disappoint the science-fiction "buff." It is a good tale written in the current science-fiction style. It suffers somewhat from too specific biochemical and physical explanations. A little vagueness in yet-to-be-discovered scientific facts would have protected the author from experts questioning some of his scientific assumptions, but

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this is more a matter of detail than a serious flaw. There are a few areas where I have reservations about the characterizations drawn. The human personnel of the spaceship are portrayed as the intellectual leaders of earth around 3000 A.D. Special sacraments involving fire, ceremonial flutes, and healing salves which these learned people go through at critical periods seem more appropriate to a Jonestown cult than to a group of research scientists and sophisticated theologians and philosophers. And, as a research scientist myself, I find it positively repelling to read Davidson's description of the reception of a momentous scientific breakthrough: "The room erupted—'He is insane!' a male voice shouted. The word eddied around each island of consternation in the room." Scientists do not react to new ideas in this way, and surely Davidson knows it. The reader has to be tolerant of overdramatic prose to get to the heart of some really provocative theological discussions.

As the story progresses, two competing spaceships direct the cultural evolution of their different species, and Davidson provides each with a messiah. But he talks down to his audience when he fashions his allegory very closely after the Christian tradition. His episodes include the annunciation, the virgin birth, God's only begotten son, the carpenter foster father, instruction in the temple, the cleansing of the temple, the disciples, miraculous healing, the loaves and the fishes, the Last Supper, ceremonial execution, rolling away the tombstone, the empty grave, the ascension into heaven. The author could have emphasized the necessity of a messiah in the development of a religion without following the New Testament in so many details. On the other hand I find his use of dramatic episodes from the Old Testament to be quite delightful. He has his creatures act out quite a number of them: the creation, Adam and Eve, Gabriel flashing revelations to the prophets, Cain and Abel, the flood, Abraham and Isaac, the Ten Commandments, David and Goliath, and stories from Job and Ezekiel, to mention a few. These are done with a subtlety that is fun for the reader to recognize.

At the conclusion Davidson sets the stage for his next work by letting the humanoids on his remote planet evolve to a higher state than the "gods" who produced them. Having put their gods briefly in a futuristic zoo or mental institution (it is difficult to tell which), these humanoids let their gods go their way. The book comes to an end leaving me looking forward to Davidson's treatment of this stimulating theological proposition in a subsequent novel.

SANBORN C. BROWN  
 Professor Emeritus of Physics  
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

*The Worlds of Science and Religion.* By DON CUPITT. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1976. 115 pages. \$3.50.

In this short volume Don Cupitt discusses a wide range of issues in the debate concerning the relation between science and religion. Beginning with an entertaining and illuminating report of a discussion between his children concerning Creation versus evolution as an account of the origin of the world, he formulates and then proceeds to evaluate the ramifications of the "two worlds" theory—the view that science and religion occupy different logical spaces and therefore cannot come into conflict. It is that thesis and its complications which Cupitt considers in the succeeding chapter. He argues that there simply is no single "problem" of science and religion. Christianity in particular has committed itself to unity through doctrine rather than through ethnic identity or ritual practice. This has required Christianity to propose a coherent world picture on a vast scale, to make that picture central to its belief, and to strive to incorporate all external truth coherently into itself.

Cupitt then rehearses the decline and fall of this synthesis under pressure from the developing alternative cosmology of the seventeenth century. With Isaac Newton and the independent development of the concept of "natural law," strains became focused around the concept of miracle, the crucial point of apparent conflict between the old religious cosmology and the developing scientific picture of nature as a system of regular laws. Cupitt discusses some of the major religious and theological responses to this dilemma (pietism, interpretation of natural law as laws of the Creator, separation of the realms of history and nature) and ends the chapter by noting some softening in modern discussion of the mechanistic picture of natural law typical of the seventeenth century.

In the next two chapters Cupitt considers the issues surrounding application of the presuppositions and methods of science to human studies and focusses briefly but clearly on free will, determinism, and the concept of human responsibility.

In the concluding chapters he discusses the function and importance of public and shared ritual action and the current debate concerning the "objectivity" of scientific knowledge. He argues that a completely scientific world picture devoid of "ritual mapping" of reality is inadequate for the maintenance of social and political life and that recent developments away from Positivism in the philosophy of science may make possible a degree of rapprochement between the "natural" and "moral" orders.

This volume is designed primarily for use with undergraduates or lay discussion groups; it raises many issues briefly and provocatively and concludes each chapter with questions for discussion. Nevertheless even those familiar with the issues may find it an entertainingly written and stimulating perspective on a wide range of issues in science and religion.

MARTIN COOK

Graduate Student in the Divinity School  
University of Chicago

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