

Reviews

Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Community, Identity, Continuity. By Gowan Dawson and Bernard Lightman. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014. 345 pp. Hardcover \$45.00.

A number of books of recent date have made significant contributions to our understanding of the Victorian coterie known as the “scientific naturalists.” A comprehensive survey of the last few decades of scholarship in this field can be found in Gowan Dawson and Bernard Lightman’s introduction to their *Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Community, Identity, Continuity* (2014).

Dedicated to Frank Miller Turner, who was one of the first scholars to use “scientific naturalism” as a historiographic category to describe a group of Victorian intellectuals—namely, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Tyndall, William Kingdon Clifford, Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, John Lubbock, Edward Tylor, George H. Lewes, E. Ray Lankester, Henry Maudsley, Frederic Harrison, Leslie Stephen, John Morley, Grant Allen, and Edward Clodd—with the supposed common goal of redefining nature, humanity, society, and science, Dawson and Lightman have collected a group of essays first presented at a workshop on “Revisiting Evolutionary Naturalism: New Perspectives on Victorian Science and Culture” at York University in 2011.

They begin their introduction with an etymological survey of “scientific naturalism,” showing that long before Huxley used it in his *Essays upon Some Controverted Questions* (1892), it was employed by American evangelicals in the 1840s as a pejorative epithet. In the 1860s and 1870s, Scottish Free Church theologian David Brown and journalist and owner of the *Contemporary Review* William Brightly Rands complained that ‘scientific naturalism’ was the cause of “an inescapable sense of melancholy” and the “moral decay” of their time. Only at the turn of the decade, in a letter published in the *Secular Review*, “scientific naturalism” was used, seemingly for the first time, as an “entirely positive designation for the scientific rejection of all non-material phenomena.”

Returning to Huxley, Dawson and Lightman highlight his attempt to give the term a lengthy and respectable intellectual lineage. In his *Essays*, for instance, Huxley assured his readers that scientific naturalism does not proscribe the Bible, which, he explained, is “the most democratic book in the world,” and that its strength lies in its “ethical sense,” and as such the “human race is not yet, and possibly may never be, in a position to dispense with it.” In short, Huxley’s strategy was to make scientific naturalism “unimpeachably respectable, scrupulously cleansed of all the deleterious ethical and political connotations it had accrued since first coming into usage in the 1840s.”

Indeed, Huxley’s usage matched earlier connotations of the scientific *naturalist*, which simply meant being an expert and specialist practitioner of the life sciences.

This leads Dawson and Lightman to suggest that ‘scientific naturalism’ and ‘scientific naturalist’ were “actor’s categories for much of the nineteenth century,” polemical constructs “employed by both evangelicals and secularists even before it was taken up by the archpolemicist Huxley.”

Dawson and Lightman then turn to twentieth-century and twenty-first century developments. The work of Frank Turner is of course mentioned. But they also point out Robert M. Young’s collection of essays in *Darwin’s Metaphor: Nature’s Place in Victorian Culture* (1985), where Young stresses continuity between natural theology and Darwinism, “pointing out that while natural theology was built on an explicitly theological theodicy, scientific naturalism similarly rested on a secular theodicy based on biological conceptions and the assumptions of the uniformity of nature.” Two years later Lightman published *The Origins of Agnosticism* (1987), which argued that “there were many vestiges of traditional religious thought embedded in Victorian agnosticism” and even the “possibility that agnosticism originated in a religious context.” They also mention the influential work of Ruth Barton, especially her essays on the X-Club, John Tyndall, and the origins of the scientific journal, *Nature*.

More recently, historians of science have begun marginalizing Turner’s notion of an emerging, professional scientific elite. Adrian Desmond’s *The Politics of Evolution* (1989), Ann Secord’s “Science in the Pub” (1994), James Secord’s *Victorian Sensation* (2000), John van Wyhe’s *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (2004), and Lightman’s *Victorian Popularizers of Science* (2007) pushed “back the establishment of a secular naturalistic tendency in British science into the 1830s and 1840s,” essentially placing the scientific naturalists on the periphery. We should add here Lightman’s own collection of essays on *Evolutionary Naturalism in Victorian Britain* (2009), which examined the enduring strength of religion in the late nineteenth century and the vestiges of religious thought among the scientific naturalists, the problems of communicating their message to the general public, and Victorian critics of scientific naturalism and their strong resemblance to postmodern criticism.

Despite being pushed to the periphery in modern scholarship, Huxley and the scientific naturalists continue to fascinate. Paul White’s *Thomas Huxley: Making the Man of Science* (2003) demonstrates that Huxley’s self-identity was “drawn, in part, from his understanding of domesticity, literature, and religion.” Dawson’s own *Darwin, Literature, and Victorian Respectability* (2007) shows how advocates of scientific naturalism constructed “their model of professional scientific authority in line with their opponents’ standards of respectability.” Here again we should also add Lightman and Michael S. Reidy’s *The Age of Scientific Naturalism* (2014), which focuses on physicist John Tyndall, but also contains excellent essays on Herbert Spencer and the metaphysical roots of his evolutionary naturalism, William Clifford’s use of Spencerian evolution, and many others.

“The time is right,” write Dawson and Lightman, “to return to those canonical figures, in the light of the new scholarly agendas, and reevaluate their status as icons of the Victorian scientific scene.” With a focus on “forging friendships,” “institutional politics,” “broader alliances,” and “new generations,” this volume of essays offers “new perspectives on Victorian scientific naturalism that . . . produce

a radically different understanding of the movement centering on the issues of community, identity, and continuity.”

JAMES C. UNGUREANU
 School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry
 The University of Queensland
 St Lucia, QLD, 4072, Australia
 jcungureanu@gmail.com

The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology. By Hans Schwarz. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013. xiv + 402 pp. Softcover \$35.00.

The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology is the latest monograph by senior Lutheran systematic theologian Hans Schwarz, professor emeritus of Regensburg University, Germany. It is not a translation but an original contribution of his in English. The book, which consists of eight chapters, is divided into three parts indicating the main topics Schwarz focuses on, namely (I) a special place [sc. humans occupy] in the world (pp. 3–121), (II) human freedom (pp. 123–266), and (III) humanity as community of men and women (pp. 267–382). These parts are followed by a brief conclusion (pp. 383–85) and three indices: names, subjects, and biblical as well as other ancient texts references; a bibliography is missing.

This solidly worked, accessibly written, and well-documented study was undertaken with the following three concerns in mind: (1) to state “the biblical testimony” about the human being and human beings, respectively, (2) to present the “major voices through the centuries” which interpreted such testimony, and (3) to affirm “this tradition in view of rival options and of the factual evidence the various sciences have unearthed” so far (p. xii). Since Schwarz is interested in making the biblical account and its interpretation by theologians old and new—mainly but not exclusively Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, and Tillich—intelligible to contemporary readers, he shows genuine pastoral concern in his presentation by avoiding polemics, by explaining almost every technical term, theological or scientific, to uninitiated readers, by inserting behind their names the years the individuals he mentions lived, and by frequently quoting biblical references in full. The book contains elaborate exegetical reflections, extensive accounts of historical discourses and, especially in its latter part (pp. 330–57 f.i.), straightforward counsel, while the dialogue with the sciences is comparatively limited and very selective (i.e. mainly in pp. 31–81, 125–57).

Unlike Wolfhardt Pannenberg (*Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 1985) and Philip Hefner (*The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* 1993), who embedded their reflections on the topic in constant dialogue with the sciences, Schwarz sets out with the “Biblical perspective” on the human being (chap. 1, pp. 5–29) before considering what the life sciences (chap. 2, pp. 31–81) and philosophy (chap. 3, pp. 83–121) have to contribute, since “in our secular age we dare not omit some reflections from the secular side and its projection of the human future” (p. 2). Next he tackles the issue of human freedom but reverses the approach by now first expounding “the perspective of the sciences” (chap. 4, pp. 125–57) before

giving “the biblical view of human evil” (chap. 5, pp. 159–75) and recording at length “the understanding of sin in the tradition of the church” (chap. 6, pp. 177–266) to challenge the Enlightenment optimism regarding human freedom and the ability of humans to choose their future destiny, an attitude still dominant in scientific pursuits today. “It seems that humans, though strong in their approach to the outside world, actually have feet of clay” (p. 2; see also pp. 264–66); that is, feet which break under the burdens of self-destiny and self-aggrandizement, of which the ecological crisis, to which Schwarz frequently refers (p. 3, 26, 28, 83, 377, and so on), is but only one example. In chapter 7 (pp. 267–42), the author turns his attention to the theme of “distinction and unity of man and woman” with an elaborated section on “marriage” (pp. 309–42), touching upon issues of homosexuality and transgender only in passing (pp. 307–09). The final chapter, which he has somewhat artificially conjoined to the previous one to form part III of his book, deals with “human destiny” (pp. 343–82), expressly with eschatology and resurrection. It culminates in the pastoral call that since “the God whom we know is indeed a gracious God . . . we should proclaim with Christ the joyful victory over all negativity, and rest assured that human beings are not lonesome wanderers at the fringe of the universe staring into eternal nothingness, but children of the heavenly Father who has provided for them an eternal destiny of joy and fulfillment” (p. 382).

No doubt, the author has a serious concern for publishing this study. With an attitude conveying urgency, he calls his readers and students to live up to the truly enormous, overwhelming challenges contemporary society faces by reaffirming the biblical testimony as it has been handed down in the tradition of the Christian Church, the Protestant in particular. While the book, thus, is also a moving document of personal commitment to and a reflection of Lutheran theology, one would have wished its discourse to be more ecumenical and, despite the brief mention of reincarnation on pages 369–70, far more interreligious. Theological anthropology in the global, multicultural, and multireligious age cannot ignore competing religious worldviews any longer; it has to address these and get involved in respective dialogues or else it soon turns stale and only adds one more point of view to the plethora of voices already speaking.

CHRISTOFFER H. GRUNDMANN

John R. Eckrich University Professor in Religion and the Healing Arts
Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA
Christoffer.Grundmann@valpo.edu