

Reviews

Religion vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think. By Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. ix + 224 pages. Hardcover, US \$29.95.

It is unquestionable that most of the writing in the field of religion and science proceeds along argumentative lines that interact with ideas and frequently ground these more lofty discussions with case studies. In that body of literature, sophisticated philosophical, theological, and spiritual concepts are often treated in relation to contemporary natural and theoretical science. Arguments focused on social, ethical, and even political topics sometimes feature. Yet, rarely are they backed up by empirical social scientific research. Elaine Howard Ecklund is well known in the field for bucking this trend with her successful book *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (2010). Therein, she presented the results of her work with elite scientists working at U.S. universities.

The present volume's title invokes that success but also expands the remit of the research, this time in collaboration with fellow sociologist Christopher P. Scheitle. Together, they have crafted a mixed-methods research framework that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to social research. This framework allows Ecklund and Scheitle to gain access to people's views on a range of scientific questions from the anthropogenic nature of global climate change to the proper application of *in vitro* fertilization techniques. The data they generated are interesting and reported in this book in conversation with some theological and philosophical concepts, other empirical research, insights from academic conferences, and ideas from popular media. In this manner, the authors present a picture of a less conflict-laden relationship between religion and science. This picture is filled in when the volume moves beyond the antireligious rhetoric of figures like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris and even beyond the academy. As such, for example, the authors are able to report that scientists who are not employed at universities are as likely to be religious as the general U.S. population. In this volume, they also focus on the views religious people hold about science and are able to discern marked attitudes, particularly among U.S. evangelicals, that reflect a deeply held (mis)understanding that most scientists are disrespectful of faith-driven worldviews.

This example is also indicative of how this volume includes not merely reporting, but also recommendations (though not always firmly linked to the social scientific data) for overcoming conflict. Most of these recommendations center on creating better communicative processes, based on the premise that "religious believers and scientists need to meet face-to-face" (p. 141) so as to break down stereotypes that impede dialogue. Ecklund and Scheitle frame such encounters as allowing to surface a basic respect for science that they found active among religious people to surface. These encounters can also operationalize an openness to

religion particularly present in scientists based outside of universities. To activate this dual-track potential, they recommend beginning by focusing on topics where there is little tension. One promising area identified in this regard is the pursuit of common interests, for example, of a shared interest in alleviating human suffering.

One tension to note from a more international perspective is that the title implies a universalism, where in fact it deals with the U.S. context almost exclusively in terms of the social scientific data collected. More substantively, the authors may be overreaching with their claims concerning the importance of this volume as represented by their summative assertion that

in these chapters, we have heard the voices of religious Americans from different faith traditions. We have looked at the survey statistics and listened to the interviews. We have dispelled myths and uncovered realities . . . We have pushed scholars to move in new directions. We have addressed the scholarship of theologians, historians, and philosophers by advancing knowledge of what contemporary people from different religious groups really think about scientists and science and how they see the relationship between religion and science. (p. 139)

The relevant issue belittled by such grandiose claims is that much of what Ecklund and Scheitle present in their analysis and recommendations is already “old hat” to those who reflectively consider scientific issues across religious and denominational boundaries. This outcome may be taken as indicative of a certain lack of breadth and depth of engagement with the above-mentioned argumentative and theoretical work that has already tackled many of the promises and perils present when science and religion meet.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that Ecklund and Scheitle helpfully use the softer science of sociology as a bridge to present empirical data, which is so important in much of the contemporary scientific enterprise. However, they ultimately run up against the same barriers and suggest comparable solutions to those already identified and addressed in the existing theological, philosophical, and historical literature. This is not to undermine their basic insight about asking people what they think about relationships between science and religion. Rather, their contribution should be recognized for adding a more substantive empirical foundation to an already active conversation, one taking place not only in the United States but in other contexts around the world.

Further, the authors fail to meaningfully address that this conversation may have already influenced some of their respondents’ views. In this light, and thinking of possible readers who are likely to pick up this book, this book will be valuable for those working to foster dialogue on religion and science, providing context, paths, and suggestions beyond those available in more esoteric discussions. Another constituency whose members may be likely to be moved by reading this book are the aforementioned elite scientists who work at universities. For them, the volume’s empirical methodology that largely precedes the discussion of the social and ethical implications of encounters between religion and science may provide the entry point they need to overcome stereotypes about religion, and those of U.S. evangelicals in particular. This broadening of horizons can, in turn, open

spaces for dialogue. As Ecklund and Scheitle's research, reporting, and analysis in this volume imply, given the political influence of those two groups in the United States, combined with the politicization of scientific issues with social impact like global climate change, such dialogue is valuable in and of itself. As such, this volume offers cogent insight, most especially for readers interested in one of the goals of this journal: engaging the intersections of science and religion as they function in the lives of individuals and in societies.

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Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine: Evolutionary Theory and Religion in Modern Japan. By G. Clinton Godart. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 341 pages. Hardcover US \$68.00.

In his monograph *Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine: Evolutionary Theory and Religion in Modern Japan*, G. Clinton Godart challenges dominant assumptions in the scholarship that suggest that nineteenth-century Japan readily adapted to Darwinism and Western science. For although the appropriation of Darwin's evolutionary theory happened rapidly in Japan, within a few decades of the late nineteenth century the process was one of many frictions and adaptations to local social norms and expectations. Like elsewhere in the world, evolutionary theory was a controversial theory that gave rise to ideological and religious polarization. Evolutionary theory offered a new and unfamiliar framework from which explosive political and ideological interpretations of the world arose and were debated, but it also led to constructive developments, which, read into a specific historical framework, allow for an interesting insight into a particular part of modern Japan's cultural and religious history. In his book, Godart deals with a topic that has been investigated before, but not in the same detail and never before in English. In six chapters, stretching to 341 pages (including a Japanese and English-language bibliography), Godart introduces the reader to an intriguing universe of Japanese academics, journalists, intellectuals, activists, and religious thinkers and their response to the new evolutionist ideas that flowed into Japan from the West with the Meiji restoration from 1868.

From the first chapter on, Godart manages to demonstrate the complex field of thoughts and ideas against whose backdrop the religious transmission of Darwin's evolutionary theory took place, and throughout the book the author gives excellent

examples of the fuzzy and often ambiguous relationship that characterized the categories of science and religion in late nineteenth-century Japan.

Ideas based on both evolutionary-like theories and religious criticism did exist in Japan before the arrival of Darwin's theory (pp. 22–23). As Godart shows, however, it was the American zoologist Edward Morse who first introduced Darwin and his evolutionary theory to Japan, in a series of talks held at Tokyo University in 1877. Along with American scholar Ernest Fenollosa, Morse spoke highly not only of the biological aspects of evolutionary theory, but also of the social implications of Darwin's theory. Especially Fenollosa's lectures on Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology* in 1878 allowed for the first phase of evolutionary theory to seamlessly be accepted by the religious elite of Japan, including Buddhist scholar Enryō Inoue. One of the central arguments for the "natural adaption" of evolutionary theory was, according to Inoue, that Buddhism (in contrast to Christianity's incommensurable relationship to evolution theory) had been teleologically determined by modern science. By introducing scientific ideas related to evolution, such as the idea of uniformity of nature and the conceptualization of the "organic," Inoue and other scholars disseminated their ideas about Buddhism's compatibility with modern science and evolutionary theory and used it to attack Christianity for the lack of the same (pp. 78–79). But while Japanese Buddhists used evolutionary theory as an anti-Christian theory, Christians in Japan were also interested in pursuing the irresistible discourses of modernity and argued that their religion was also in line with Darwin. Evolution was understood based on literal interpretations of the Bible, specifically as an expression of God's creation. In addition, many Christian missionaries could point out the important influence of Christianity in the modern education system of Japan with its establishment of both schools and universities; Christianity, civilization, and science, they argued, were inextricably linked together (pp. 73–74). And that the first known Japanese text about Darwin was written by Aoiyama Nobuchiku, a Shinto priest, makes the history of the religious reception of Darwin's evolutionary theory in Japan even more interesting. According to Aoiyama, the two religions (Christianity and Buddhism) were both completely wrong in their assumption of evolutionary theory. Shinto, with its chronicles *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, its creation stories, and its family genealogies, had demonstrated it to be the "fittest" of them all and the only rightful religion to lead Japan into the modern age (pp. 23–24).

The struggle of the different religions in integrating evolutionary theory within their belief systems was thus part of a general modernization discourse that took place in the late nineteenth century. The universities had introduced the theory in the late 1870s, and religious voices showed interest in the different rhetorical possibilities it enabled: which religion was most modern and most fit to survive? Historically, this question was of great importance. For 200 years Buddhism had dominated the religious landscape, which had led to the persecution of Christianity and to a minimized role of Shinto (pp. 72–73). In the Meiji Era, however, the transmission of Darwin, evolutionary theory, Enlightenment theories, modern science, nation building, and internationalization destabilized the religious landscape of Japan and became the modern ideals against which each religion in Japan was to be evaluated.

Interestingly, as Godart luminously demonstrates in the succeeding chapters, political and social events in the Taishō (1912–26)—and especially Shōwa period (from 1926 to WWII)—turned many things around. A daunting and strong culture-defining nationalism infected several aspects of the reception of evolutionary theory in Japan. Was evolutionary theory not basically just a Western argument for individualism? Could it be combined with the national Shinto ideology? Religious agents in the Japanese landscape sought new arguments from biology, sociology, and religious history to argue for the social and ethical relationship between individuality, the state, progress, and adaptation. Buddhists such as Nishida Imanishi were especially creative in their negotiation and adaptation of evolutionary theory, and Buddhist ideas such as organic and holistic cosmology, fluid identity, and a less individualistic ethic were linked with Darwin (pp. 216–19). Agnostics, materialists, and anarchists, on the other hand, associated with the radical evolutionism of the 1920s, were ostracized and criminalized unless they supported the arguments held by the State Shinto. This could be seen when members of the Japanese state started to proclaim themselves as “fittest” in a reverse orientalist social Darwinist teleology, exemplified when a soldier after the annexation of Singapore in 1942, with reference to evolution theory, stated: “Europeans descend from the apes, the Japanese from the gods” (p. 157). In the 1930s and 1940s, State Shinto became the ideological bulwark against evolutionary teachings, and hints of demythologization of Shinto myths became punishable. Evolutionary theory was now identified with “individualism, materialism, western imperialism, Marxism, consumerism, capitalism, and even promiscuity” (p. 194). The aftermath’s “embrace of science and democracy” (p. 251) was in many ways a return to the prenatalist acceptance of Darwin and his theory, with a general acceptance of his scientific, philosophical, and religious frameworks.

In many ways, Japanese modernity was a success story. That Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was still on the bestseller list in 1903 says something about the general curiosity about the new science of the West. Godart ascribes the general acceptance of Western science in Japan to the fact that it was a country characterized by religious pluralism, without a monopoly of one dominating orthodox doctrine. There existed at the time, he argues, almost a synergy between evolution and religion (p. 234)—not least because State Shinto, according to him, in a sense never really became a state religion. The challenge for the Japanese was not evolutionary theory and the transformation of species, but the social and ethical consequences that such theories awoke, or as Godart puts it, “The perceived disenchantment of the world by Darwin proved just as threatening in Japan as everywhere else in the world” (p. 235). Interesting thoughts, which in no way can be said to be fully exhausted, as the author also himself mentions in the last three pages of the book. It would perhaps have given the book a meta-historical and theoretical boost if these plausible claims could have been unfolded further, perhaps by addressing additional and relevant thinkers and patterns (such as the role university scholars or Christian missionaries played in these developments). However, this is a negligible criticism of an otherwise interesting and relevant book.

Godart has in this book managed to give a good and broad overview of a complex field, which formed an essential part of modern Japanese history. The book is a fine corrective to the past's oversimplified works and stories and will contribute significantly to two of the most debated topics in the history of evolutionary theory: religion and the sociopolitical legacy of evolutionary theory. It is a valuable read for students and scholars interested in Darwin studies and Japanese intellectual history, religion, and philosophy.

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Naturalism and Religion: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation. By Graham Oppy. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018. vi + 199 pages. Hardcover, \$259; Softcover, \$70.99.

Graham Oppy's new book makes a general defense of a no-frills naturalism. It is a part of the book series *Investigating Philosophy of Religion* and stands as something of a black sheep among other titles, which approach modern religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism from a philosophical perspective. *Naturalism and Religion*, by contrast, seeks to make a philosophical case for naturalism over all such religious explanatory frameworks. This book would be of benefit to any scholar who wishes to understand what naturalism is, and whether it can provide a coherent, plausible, and satisfactory answer to the "big questions" typically thought to lie within the magisterium of religion.

According to Oppy's brand of naturalism, reality is exhausted by "natural causal entities with none but natural causal powers" (p. 25). Oppy accepts that "well-established science is our touchstone for identifying natural causal entities and natural causal powers" (p. 2). So, our guide for determining what will count as a natural entity or power is *current established science* (current established science is, roughly, the set of scientific claims about which there is at present, and into the foreseeable future, widespread expert agreement). The book's most general aim is to demonstrate that the very best naturalistic "big pictures" (something akin to a worldview) can be defended against attacks from the very best religious ones. To be clear, this book does not seek primarily to critique religious belief (although it does make the odd jab), but instead seeks to defend naturalism from recent philosophical attacks. In order to mount such a defense, Oppy must juggle several hot potatoes at once, the three hottest being the very concepts of naturalism, religion, and science, all of which are heavily contested.

For this reason, Oppy is careful to draw a circle around the precise notion of naturalism, which he seeks to defend. The circle he draws is minimal, as he hopes to make something of a big tent for naturalists of all stripes to be included. Thus, he accepts that some naturalists are committed to the existence of some abstract

entities, such as numbers, so long as such entities are taken to be noncausal. He accepts also that some naturalists may be committed to the existence of mental causation, where mental causal powers are identified with neural causal powers, for example. Oppy is also careful to distinguish naturalism from some closely related ideas with which it is often conflated, such as ontological physicalism (some naturalists accept some emergent phenomena) scientism, humanism, and empiricism (pp. 12–14).

Equally careful is Oppy in outlining how he has arrived at his particular definition of religion. Following the work of Atran and Norenzayan (2004), Oppy defines religions as communal displays of costly commitments to the satisfaction of nonnatural causal beings and/or the overcoming of nonnatural causal regulative structures (p. 31). Such an account of religion sets belief in nonnatural causal agents and/or regulative structures as a necessary feature. Thus, it appears, by definition, that naturalism and religion are opposed, and that one cannot be a logically consistent “religious naturalist.” Interestingly, Oppy charges that there is no prospect of giving an “insider” definition of religion, since typically any believer belongs only to a tiny fraction of the world’s religious traditions. It follows that nobody could be suitably well-placed to give an insider definition which did justice to the commitments of the adherents of other traditions. “Unless we wish to say that there is really only one religion,” says Oppy, “it seems that the requirements of definition will force us to give an outsider account” (p. 33). However, certain pluralist and perennialist conceptions of religion are what might be thought of as “insider” accounts of religion. Yet, such accounts often manage to extend to a great many contrary religious traditions. Perhaps more convincingly, Oppy charges that common insider accounts that stress the role of “transcendence” or “religious experience” fail to include traditions that stress, say, orthopraxy over orthodoxy (p. 34).

In the fourth chapter, Oppy considers the prospects for developing a “naturalistic religion” and he surveys some possible candidates. It becomes clear that there are, roughly speaking, two ways to attempt to develop a naturalistic religion. One could attempt to “naturalize” the nonnatural commitments of some existing religious tradition (e.g., one could identify God with the sum total of human loving relationships). Conversely, one could attempt to bring communal, ritual displays to bear on the commitments of naturalistic big pictures (e.g. one could develop something like the “Sunday Assembly” movement). Of those committed to the first approach, Oppy assesses pantheism, panentheism, and John Bishop’s “euteleological” view. Of those committed to the latter, Oppy considers religious naturalism, the “religion of humanity,” and religious humanism. In brief, Oppy concludes that the former views are either inconsistent with naturalism or ultimately “inadequate foundations for religion” (p. 55). The latter views are found to be either nothing at all like religions, or impossible to manufacture in a naturalistic setting successfully, given that the success of religious belief can be explained as the result of “non-functional products of human cognitive mechanisms [which] become the locus of emotionally motivated self-sacrifice that stabilizes in-group order and assuages existential anxiety” (p. 53).

The next four chapters are the crucial chapters in which Oppy considers the relationship between naturalism, science, and religion. In the course of these chapters, Oppy considers arguments against naturalism, giving detailed

treatment to arguments from Alvin Plantinga, Michael Rea, and Thomas Aquinas. Subsequently, he asks whether science defeats religion. That is to say, he asks whether there is a conflict between scientific and religious claims, which ought to be settled on the side of science. Somewhat surprisingly in a book that leans toward scientism, Oppy concludes that since religious claims need not contradict scientific ones, one can avoid the conclusion that science defeats religion. Surely, a stronger claim could be made here. Elsewhere, for example, Oppy says that “all religions include reports of miracles” (p. 169). Either this last claim is hyperbole, or science and religion actually do conflict in a way that would imply, by Oppy’s lights, that science defeats religion at least in common practice.

The eighth chapter of this book is the most important. It argues that naturalism indeed defeats religion (even if science can’t). Oppy’s argument is a simple appeal to old Ockham and his razor. The best naturalistic big pictures are *minimal*, insofar as their theoretical commitments are a subset of the theoretical commitments of all other best big pictures. Moreover, the best naturalistic big pictures are *maximal*, insofar as their depth, breadth, and adequacy of explanation is concerned (p. 151). In short, the extra theoretical commitments of best religious big pictures are straight-up costs for no extra benefit. Oppy discusses some of the phenomena routinely presented as best explained by nonnatural entities or causal powers (e.g., miracles, consciousness, religious experience) and takes his examples from an admirably wide set of religious traditions. The case that Oppy makes in this chapter is simple and persuasive, and so it is surprising to read, by way of conclusion, “I do not claim that the case that I have set out is successful; I do not claim that anyone who fails to be persuaded by this case is irrational . . . So long as there are intelligent, sensitive, well-informed people who do not agree with what I’ve said, I have the best of reasons for supposing that the case that I have set out is not successful” (p. 184). While humility may be a virtue, self-deprecation is not. Perhaps Oppy is right that his case is unlikely to *persuade* anyone, since “it cannot persuade anyone who already accepts it, and is unlikely to persuade anyone who does not already accept it” (p. 185). However, it seems unnecessarily cautious (and rhetorically awry) to conclude that one, therefore, has the best of reasons to think one’s own argument unsuccessful.

Indeed, this is an important theme in Oppy’s book, which is left unanalyzed. The very notion that expert agreement provides good grounds for rational belief is not expanded upon. He describes science as “a collective enterprise of data-driven description, prediction, and understanding in which universal expert agreement functions as regulative ideal” (p. 127), but little more is said about the evidential value of this kind of agreement. Of course, universal expert agreement is a very useful thing to find, but where we find such agreement, we have found only *further* evidence that the proposition agreed upon is true (or empirically adequate, or accurate, or whatever). This is just because such an agreement signals to insiders and outsiders alike that the explanation successfully accounts for the phenomena in question (at least, according to the principles of evidence and justification accepted within that knowledge community). Put briefly, when experts disagree, they do not get relationship counseling. They criticize and test the competing hypotheses. If that’s because criticism and testing are good ways to eliminate error, then given the careful and critical approach that Oppy has adopted in arguing his

case, he should perhaps be a little more confident that his arguments are successful, whether or not they are capable of persuading his critics.

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